

The Becky Thatcher House

Virtual Tour by Claire Sincox, age 14

In the beloved story *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, or rather, Samuel Clemens, Tom spies a girl that is new in town. "He saw a new girl in the garden--a lovely little blue-eyed creature with yellow hair plaited into two long tails, white summer frock and embroidered pantalettes." This "creature" whom Twain describes in his novel is Becky Thatcher.

Becky Thatcher was inspired by Clemens's childhood neighbor, schoolmate, and sweetheart, Laura Hawkins. Laura was blonde-haired, like Becky, and she and young Sam Clemens were known to have been close friends. In fact, Sam had always been the top speller in his class and would prove it when spelling bees were held. One afternoon, he purposefully misspelled a word so that Laura would win instead of him!

Laura grew up in the house on Hill Street in Hannibal, Missouri just across from Sam's boyhood home. It is a rather large, white home containing many large rooms on the inside.

The Hawkins' house is now maintained as a museum property by the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum in this famous river town where Sam and Laura grew up. There is a gift shop on the first floor where souvenirs and books of all kinds can

be purchased. There is a Children's Play Discovery Area on that floor as well, where children can dress up as Becky or Tom would have in the mid-1800s or play some games that were also popular in that time period, such as checkers. Presently, when tourists go upstairs, they see Laura's old bedroom and a mannequin of her and Sam's older sister, Pamela. Perhaps the two are "talking" about an upcoming party that everyone will be attending. Photos of Laura Hawkins in her later years grace the walls. In one, she is sitting pouring tea, and in the other she is sitting with Mrs. George Mahan over tea.

Laura's room is decorated brightly, with a beautiful fireplace and

items from that era that are typical of what might have been seen in her room. Perched on the mantle are three china dogs which were actual gifts that Laura received on her tenth birthday.

Although the Becky Thatcher House is interesting in its present state, it is going to soon be going under careful refurbishing during which the house will be taken apart, and then put back together. The restoration will be done in phases. The first phase will include mostly structural work, to make sure that the home is safe for people to visit. The second phase will focus on the new exhibits which will be featured there. Genuine artifacts from the early Hannibal period will be used in the restoration



"About half-past nine or ten o'clock he came along the deserted street to where the Adored Unknown lived..."



A sign outside the home offers visitors a bit of history

to make the experience even more real for visitors who travel from all over the world to see this beautiful home.

The restored Becky Thatcher House will include new interactive exhibits that teach visitors about children's lives in the early 19th century. Some of the exhibits will include *Kids at Home*, *Kids at School*, and *Kids at Work*. The *Kids at School* exhibit will portray a schoolroom from the mid-

1800s. Becky and Tom will be seated inside the room and Huck and Jim, who was a slave, will be peeking in the window of the school to show that Huck could not afford to go to school, and Jim was forbidden by law to attend school. The *Kids at Work* exhibit will describe the daily chores of different characters from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, such as Jim, Huck, Tom, and of course, Becky.

The front parlor will educate guests on Laura's friendship with Sam. The two were close friends, just like Tom and Becky. There will also be dolls to play with, dress-up clothes for both boys and girls, and games from the era visitors can enjoy while experiencing something of the early Hannibal period.

Through the restoration of this beautiful house and all of the wonderful new exhibits that the museum has planned, visitors will catch a glimpse of

what life was like during the time that Samuel Clemens and Laura Hawkins grew up across the street from each other in Hannibal, Missouri.

~C.S.



"...his face lit up, right away, for she tossed a pansy over the fence a moment before she disappeared."

"Becky's" home is on Hill Street directly across from Sam Clemens' boyhood home



New interactive exhibits will offer visitors a glimpse into the lifestyles of Hannibal in the mid 1800s

Visitors can dress up in period costumes, enjoy a game of checkers or wander through the rooms of Becky's house



“Say, Becky, was you ever engaged?”



Visitors to Hannibal should not be surprised if they meet Tom and Becky downtown. The Chamber of Commerce sponsors the Tom and Becky Program in which 7th grade students compete for the opportunity to portray Tom and Becky for one year. These ambassadors for Hannibal will act out the engagement scene from Tom Sawyer with such realism that visitors momentarily travel back in time to those wonderful carefree days.