



Hannibal, Missouri

Cardiff Hill

Virtual Tour by Cassidy Alexander, age 13



A statue of Tom and Huck greets visitors as they begin their ascent of Cardiff Hill. President Jimmy Carter visited Cardiff Hill with his wife Rosalyn and daughter Amy.

Special points of interest:

- *Memorial Bridge Overlook*
- *Becky's Butterfly Garden*
- *Mark Twain Memorial Lighthouse*

“Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation and it lay just far enough away to seem a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting.” So penned Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the book that immortalized a hill, a town, and a childhood worth remembering again and again.

The wondrous nature and beauty of Cardiff Hill is something that I hope to share with you. The hill is found in Hannibal, Missouri, Mark Twain’s home town. Hannibal is a quaint, hospitable small town with many sights worth discovering. If you have read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, then you know the significance of Cardiff Hill. For those of you who don’t, Cardiff Hill provides an inviting setting for Tom and his comrades to act out scenes from Robin Hood, search for pirate treasure, and play hooky. Cardiff Hill is about a block away from Mark Twain’s boyhood home on the north end of town. To the south stands the rocky bluff of Lover’s Leap, so the old



“...a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting.”

downtown is nestled between these two majestic bookends.

Cardiff Hill is an exceptionally steep hill, covered with the lush greenery of locust trees and wildflowers. A statue of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn stands at the foot of the hill, a testament to their adventurous ways. The statue, built in 1926, is believed to be one of the very first statues erected to honor purely fictional characters. Huckleberry Finn stands on the left, recognizable by his tattered hat and frayed clothes. He leans expectantly on a long stick. Tom Sawyer is on the right,

dressed more fashionably than Huck, and sporting an attractive cap. He carries a bag slung over his shoulder, presumably carrying the proverbial dead cat. Huck’s hand appears to grasp Tom’s shoulder as though to say, “Hold on, Tom” while Tom is clearly stepping out toward some new adventure.

A staircase winds its way up the hill. As you begin your ascent, you will discover there are 244 steps to reach the top if you bother to count. At the top of the first flight of stairs, you’ll come upon Becky’s Butterfly Garden and an overlook of the Mississippi



The reward for climbing 244 steps to the top of Cardiff Hill is a breathtaking perspective of the Mississippi River and the “white town drowsing” as Mark Twain remembered Hannibal.

River. In 1936, a bridge was opened on this site by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was called the Mark Twain Memorial Bridge. The bridge extended from this point on Cardiff Hill across the Mississippi to Illinois. The bridge grew outdated and was demolished, but a new bridge replaced it in September 2000. Pausing at the overlook offers a stunning view of the Mississippi River.

Continue up the remaining steps and you arrive at a lighthouse. Standing tall and proud, the Mark Twain Memorial Lighthouse was a gift from the White House to celebrate Mark Twain’s 100th birthday in 1935. President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated it to Mark Twain, and flipped the switch to turn on the lighthouse all the way from the Washington D.C. The lighthouse was supposed to stay up just for the one year celebration, but the



The overlook at the site of the old memorial bridge offers an inspiring view of the Mississippi River

citizens of Hannibal grew attached to the lighthouse and so the light continues to shine on. When it fell over due to some strong winds and storms, the citizens of Hannibal rebuilt it. The lighthouse was rededicated by John F. Kennedy in 1963, and again by President Bill Clinton in 1994. The

view from the lighthouse atop Cardiff Hill is a sight you want to see, encircled by thriving foliage and the sounds of a rushing river.

When Sam Clemens was a boy, the hill was known as Holliday Hill because a wealthy family of that name lived near the top. When Mr. Holliday headed west for the Gold Rush, his wife stayed behind and grew lonesome. Mrs. Holliday loved children, but had none of her own; therefore, she would invite children from the town to come over for homemade ice cream and other treats. Holliday’s Hill was eventually renamed by Mark Twain himself. During his travels he visited Cardiff in Wales. This town had mountains surrounding it, and when he wrote Tom Sawyer he decided to rename Holliday’s Hill after the famous hills of Wales.



“One is apt to overestimate beauty when it is rare.” The sun shining through a canopy of locust trees might be what Twain had in mind when he wrote this.

When tourists began flocking to Hannibal after Tom Sawyer was published asking to be shown “Cardiff Hill” the residents finally gave up and simply renamed the hill. Twain reminisced fondly about this hill that he explored in childhood writing, *“Holiday’s Hill, in our town, was to me the noblest work of God. It appeared to pierce the skies. . . I never could understand why it didn’t swathe its summit with never-failing clouds, and crown its majestic brow with everlasting snows. I had had heard such was the custom in other parts of the world.”*

Well, Dear Reader, I hope you have learned something about Cardiff Hill and Hannibal, and maybe even about Mark Twain. Hannibal is a unique town, and I hope you decide to visit someday. Mark Twain said, *“One is apt to overestimate beauty when it is rare.”* And although true beauty is rare, Cardiff Hill is one of those extraordinary places whose beauty cannot be overestimated.

~C.A.



The Mark Twain Memorial Lighthouse was constructed in 1935 to commemorate the 100th year of his birth. It has never been used as a navigational aid.



Visitors still find inspiration in viewing the Mississippi River from on top of Cardiff Hill just as Sam Clemens did.

“I passed through the vacant streets, still seeing the town as it was, and not as it is... and finally climbed Holiday's Hill to get a comprehensive view.”

~Mark Twain when he returned to visit Hannibal for the last time in 1902



Becky’s Butterfly Garden provides a welcome respite as visitors climb Cardiff Hill.