The Huck Finn House

Virtual Tour by Richard Plunkett, age 14

Nestled in the heart of historic downtown Hannibal on North Street, the Huckleberry Finn House is a monument that embodies the spirit of Mark Twain’s restless character, Huck Finn. As a boy, Samuel Langhorne Clemens played with a child by the name of Thomas Blankenship, who lived scarcely a block away from the Clemens household. The Blankenship family consisted of seven or eight children and both parents, but they were desperately poor. Tom’s father was reputed to be the town drunk, and oftentimes, they could not afford to send their children to school. Therefore, Sam Clemens, like many other children in the village, was generally forbidden to associate with or even talk to Tom Blankenship. But, like the character of Huck Finn, that made his desire to befriend the boy increase all the more. Twain did become very good friends with Blankenship during his childhood, describing the boy as, “ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed; but he had as good a heart as any boy ever had.” Twain further commented that Blankenship’s liberties were unrestricted and he was the only true independent person in the town. Tom Blankenship proved to be ample inspiration for the famous author - a person Twain instinctively knew had potential to become an interesting and realistic character. And thus, the aberrant and somewhat lawless character of Huckleberry Finn was born, a person who, similar to Blankenship, suffered terrible poverty and received little approval.

Although Huck Finn was based upon Blankenship, Twain truly personified a character all his own in his famous masterpieces, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. In Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn is first revealed to be a motherless son of the violent town drunk, with no siblings, no permanent household, and little to no possessions to call his own. This is contrary to the real-life character of Tom Blankenship, who, although suffering poverty, had a real family. Also, in reality, Tom and

Shortly Tom came upon the juvenile pariah of the village, Huckleberry Finn, son of the town drunkard. Huckleberry was cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle and lawless and vulgar and bad — and because all their children admired him so, and delighted in his forbidden society, and wished they dared to be like him. (from The Adventures of Tom Sawyer)
The Huck Finn House was reconstructed using old photographs taken prior to its demolition in 1911

his family lived in a diminutive dwelling that, although cramped, would have been large enough to provide adequate shelter. It is unknown whether the family owned or rented the property or was simply squatting, moving from place to place as they were discovered. This is one of many mysteries that surrounds the Blankenship house. The reproduction of the original abode would eventually become an honored monument to the fictional character of Huckleberry Finn. Fortunately, historians decided it was better to recreate the home using authentic materials as a tribute to Twain’s devilish delinquent.

The Huck Finn House has suffered quite a few hardships throughout the years, occasionally being torn down and rebuilt for various purposes. The current home, which was recently rebuilt using old photos as a guide, was dedicated in 2007. It is now recognized as a landmark that provides a glimpse into the mid-1800s, and will remain so forever. Although the actual house was demolished in 1911, wooden beams from the era were salvaged from other local buildings and were eventually incorporated into the reconstructed Huck Finn House. This adds an air of nostalgia to the building, which boasts a thriving vegetable garden out back, further enhancing the feel of authenticity. Observing the house from a distance, it doesn’t appear noteworthy or impressive in

~Huck Finn
As soon as Tom was back we cut along the path, around the garden fence, and by and by fetched up on the steep top of the hill the other side of the house.

~Huck Finn