

REVENANT #7

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How can it be time to do another one of these? Didn't I just finish reading the last mailing? But nothing's happened since then to write about! Or nothing much.

Summer continues non-stop at the library. Our head librarian left earlier than she thought she would because they *really really* (so they said) needed her at the new position. The person that was thought to want the job at Zachary didn't or wasn't suitable; we weren't told just what happened. But at last! We will soon have a new head beginning July 16. She is now the Director of the Audubon Regional Library System which covers East Feliciana, West Feliciana, and St. Helena parishes (to the north of here). It's a much smaller system than ours, about four libraries in all, none of them very large. I met her a week or so ago when she came by to see the Zachary Library. She said she wanted to get away from the administrative work she's been doing and get back to working directly with the public. She'll certainly have to chance to do so here; we don't have nearly enough staff so that one person can be "the boss" and just shuffle papers. She won't have an office. She will have a desk---out in the middle of the library. The rest of the staff is delighted to be getting someone, but dismayed at the thought of having to train someone from ground zero, as it were. To be sure, she knows libraries, but she won't know our system or our machines or our method of doing things. And in August, we'll lose one of our student workers who graduated high school this spring and will be going off to college out of town. It will continue to be challenging.

This is where I should be reviewing all those books I should be reading and all those movies I should have been seeing. Except I haven't. I've gotten into the bad habit of watching too much TV and reading newsgroups and mailing lists instead of books. My local cable recently added stations including the Sci-Fi Channel, so I find myself spending too much time watching *Dark Shadows* and *Babylon 5* and *Farscape*. I haven't even seen any movies of late.

This was to be the "all Twain" mailing, but it could just as well be the "swelter" mailing. July in Louisiana is being its usual hot self, and I'm having air conditioning troubles. The condenser coil is leaking, and when the drip pan fills up, the cooling part of the unit shuts off, but the fan keeps running. It is fixable, the catch being I'm set to leave town tomorrow, so I won't be able to get it done till I get back. I can't go off and leave the a/c. off entirely with the cats here; so I'll have to leave it on and hope it doesn't run non-stop all week.

My planned travel this week is to Toronto to see my sister and niece (my brother-in-law will be out of town on business). I haven't been up there in a couple of years and I'm looking forward to seeing some familiar sights. The Royal Ontario Museum is always fun; then there are all the books stores; and the St. Lawrence Market---small shops plus lots of good food stalls. We also plan to drive to Montreal for a day or so. I've been there only once briefly, so it should be exciting to see a new place. If I ever win the lottery big time (though that may be hard to do as I don't buy lottery tickets), I want to spend my summers in Canada. For someone who grew up here, I sure do hate hot weather. And speaking of weather...

The Great Flood of '01

For the past three years, the rainfall amounts around here have been below normal. last year was very bad with most of the state in drought conditions. This year wasn't quite as bad, though rainfall was still far below normal. That was until the first week of June. It started raining Monday night, and by the end of the week, we had almost 18 inches of rain! It was all due to Tropical Storm Allison, that formed in the Gulf of Mexico, came onshore in Texas and instead of moving on, hung around for days. Happily, I didn't experience any major problems. My house is elevated, so no worries about water getting in. I did have to take an alternate route to and from work for several days, because I knew at least one street I normally travel would be flooded. And Thursday morning when I woke up, my street was under water. I wondered if I'd be able to get to work; and if I could, whether I'd be able to get back home. It stopped raining long enough for me to get out that morning; and the rain slacked up enough during the day that I was able to get home that evening. The only "casualty" I suffered was the loss of my tomato plants. I had four plants in the ground that were doing well and had produced nice tomatoes that were beginning to ripen. The rain drowned two of them outright; the other two struggled along, but they eventually succumbed, too. It's a shame, because the ones that did ripen were very good. Next year, maybe I'll do a raised bed.

Of course, the library stayed open through all of this! At least, our branch did; a couple of others had to close a day or two because of water over their streets. Our patrons came (forgive the expression) "pouring in" all along during the worst of it. Flash flood watches, flash flood warnings, advice to stay off the roads---nothing phases them!

Plans for Travel

I've been going back and forth in my mind for the past several months about whether or not I'd go to World Con this year. Right after Chicon, I was definitely planning to attend since I'd had such a good time there. Then the hotel rates were pubbed and I thought, "I can't afford that! But I want to go!" Then I had a month where the finances were very bad, and the money was very low; and I decided not to go. Then I

changed my mind again, and made my hotel and plane reservations before I could change my mind again! I still can't afford it; and haven't come up with a roommate yet; but barring any disasters, I should be there. I'm hoping to stay well enough that I can do some sightseeing before the con. I've never been to Philadelphia and I'd like to see some of it. I also hope this con is not a let-down after last year. I have no reason to think that it will be, but with the high costs of the hotel (the Hawthorne suites, not even the main hotel), plus the high airfare, I'm feeling grumpy about the way I'm having to spend money. I realize how good a time I have will in part depend on me; so I'll try to get a better attitude before Labor Day weekend.

Mailing Comments

New Port News/Ned Brooks: Ct me: I remember the Tim Kirk Tolkien calendar---I had one and loved the artwork at the time. Recently I saw one or two of the pictures that were used reprinted in another book. I still like the artwork: I'll have to try to get a copy of the re-issue of the pictures---maybe they'll be available at WorldCon? The library has already gotten some LOTR tie-in books. Not schlock, but well-thought out books with maps, and chronologies. Fun stuff; I can feel my inner Tolkien fan re-awakening.

Twygdrasil and Treehouse Gazette/Richard Dengrove: I thought shingles was a carry-over from having had chicken pox, not measles.

Ct me on kilts: The idea of a certain plaid pattern being associated with a certain clan is a relatively modern idea; but the kilt dates back a long way. The local Caledonian Society gave a talk/ dance demo/ bagpipe playing program at one of the libraries a while back and I remember the story of the origin pretty well. The kilt started out not as a skirt, but a *plaid*---a long length of wool that one could also use as a shelter against the elements if you were out in the cold, wet Scottish countryside. One end was wrapped around the waist to form the kilt, the rest went over one shoulder. And yes, "God Save the Queen" is the British national anthem (as well as a few other places).

Ct Randy Cleary: I'll join the chorus of reminders to you that it was Arthur C. Clarke who said that "sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

Spiritus Mundi/Guy Lillian: On being a Spiritus Mundi dedicatee: Wow! What can I say? I'm thrilled! I'm honored! I'm a little bit embarrassed! Thank you, Guy; you made me feel very special.

I'm eager to hear about the wedding and hope to see pictures. So how's married life? And I hope the new digs are proving comfortable and convenient for all.

Trivial Pursuits/ Janet Gelb: Our job evaluation forms changed also from several to levels to two: "Satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory". With the old system, if you were given the top rating, your pay scale would go up two notches instead of just one. Of course, to get that top rating, not only did you have to walk on water, but you had to change it to wine as you went...

Ct me: I did finish *The Grand Ellipse*, but had no fear of library fines. It's one of the few perks library employees get---we don't have to pay fines on overdue books. Oh, and we can buy one Summer Reading Club t-shirt at reduced price. We can also order books to buy at a variable discount through the ordering department, if it's a book that the library owns or will be getting. Not a lots of perks, but the pay's bad. Seriously, it's not a bad place to work---at my branch at least all the staff gets along very well. Oh, the book. I was a little disappointed in it in that there seemed to be an undertone that all the heroine needed was a good man. And I wished that those fantasy countries didn't line up so neatly with early 20th century Europe. I did like the background, though; it made a nice change from the standard semi-medieval setting so many fantasy books use.

No, I don't live in a flood-free zone; as I was so forcefully reminded recently.

Ct Gary Brown about yourself not listening to you talking about exercise: If you ever figure out how to get yourself to listen tell me! Myself refuses to listen to me at all. And I desperately need to exercise. And diet.

Peter, Pan, & Merry/David Schlosser: Ct Guy about travel time to Philadelphia: My flight out of New Orleans to Philadelphia is non-stop and will last almost three hours. I'm not looking forward to it; not because I'm afraid of flying, but because the planes are usually cramped and I start feeling claustrophobic. Philadelphia is too far for me to consider driving---I'm not that crazy about driving either! My preferred form of travel would be matter transporter.

Tennessee Trash/Gary Robe: Congratulations on the gold medal! From what you say, you did a lot better than you could have been expected to do. The fact that you keep on going is another credit to you.

On your comments about the DSC voting: I didn't really get the impression that people were deferring to Tim Bolgeo, but I could be wrong. On the way the vote was handled: as best as I remember from the few I've attended, each DSC seems to run the voting the way they want to. I've attended at least one DSC where they took ballots to dealers in the dealers room; and I've attended at least one, probably more where the rule was you had to be in the room to vote. The written DSC rules don't address the matter of whether the vote should be written or not; but it probably should be since as you say, an abstention in a voice vote is lost.

Just because Buffy is "dead" doesn't mean she'll stay dead! I almost stopped watching the *X-Files* completely out of exasperation this year when Mulder died, was buried, and *still* came back!

Ct Copeland on doughnuts: Krispy Kreme doughnuts are excellent, to be sure; but I like beignets best of all. There's a Cafe du Monde in Baton Rouge in one of the big malls (hardly the same ambiance as the one in the French Quarter, but much closer) and I indulged recently. Beignets and cafe au lait. Yum.

You've Got Mars/Jeffrey Copeland: Continuing the "doughnut" theme from above, maybe we should see which doughnut franchises are in Philadelphia and those of us there could do a doughnut taste test. Will the Copelands be there? I wouldn't really be a good taster, though; I'll eat doughnuts, but they don't do anything special for me. As I said to Gary, I like beignets best.

Oblio/Gary Brown: Sympathies and commiserations on the dental problems. I've had abscessed teeth before and the pain is really something. I usually felt sick along with the pain, whether from the infection or the antibiotics I don't remember; happily I haven't had that problem for several years.

Congratulations to Ryan on his graduation! But a graduation ceremony at 9 A.M.? I seem remember my high school graduation (in the football stadium) taking place in the evening. Of course, a morning ceremony would allow for more comfortable temperatures.

New Tales, Old Me/mike weber: I posted it on rasff, but I'll repeat it here---my sympathies in the loss of your grandmother. I wish I had had grandparents around long enough to appreciate them. The only grandparent I remember was my father's mother. She had quite a life---raised thirteen children of her own and one of her grandchildren. In her later years after my grandfather died, she lived with her unmarried son on a dairy farm near Kentwood, Louisiana. Despite the nearness of all that milk, she never drank milk and I wonder if it's something I've inherited. It's not exactly lactose intolerance; but as far back as I could remember I didn't like milk. Cheese and ice cream was fine, and I'd drink some chocolate milk, but plain milk was out.

The bit about the folk singers who would sing only "true" folk music reminded me of the group Ad Vielle Que Pourra, a French group who claim that they sing only traditional folk music. "And to make sure it's traditional," they say, "we write it ourselves!"

Avatar Press/Randy Cleary: Are you going to tell us more about your crash? Is it over; and did you let the crushee know of your interest? I'm the last person to give advice in matters of the heart considering my dismal record; but I hope something good will come of your attraction to that person.

Good luck with the new house. It sounds like a nice one, though the picture is a little dark to see much detail. My house is the right size for me; but I still wish for something bigger, or least with more closet space. I may start reading the real estate ads again. I hope you and your mother can adjust well to living with each other; if you're used to living alone, it's a change to have another adult in the house. From what you've said of your nephew, living with him was not exactly like living with another adult.

Ct me: Let me know next time you'll be in New Orleans and as you suggested you and I and Guy could get together for lunch. We'll invite Rosy, too, shall we?

Yngvi is a Louse/T.K.F. Weisskopf: I'm one of the few here who does know Robert Neagle; known him for years. Way back when there was an active Baton Rouge fandom, some of us used to visit with some of the New Orleans fen. There was a Doctor Who fan group that he was a part of, also another group or two.

Loved the cat-themed cartoon on page 13. I talk to my cats before I leave on a long trip, explaining that I'll be gone X number of days, but that I will be back; and that the cat sitter will be coming by every day to feed them. I worry about them while I'm gone, imagining how much they miss me. When all the time, they're probably boogying away to the radio!

Home With The Armadillo/Liz Copeland: I'll have to try Robert Crais again. I read *The Monkey's Raincoat* years ago and liked it well enough, but at the time the violence level in the book struck me as too high for my liking. Did you know he has a Baton Rouge connection? He grew up here and I met him briefly once. While I was working at a local bookstore (before the library job), he came in one day looking to see if we had any of his books. He was living in California then, but was in town to see family. After he told me his name, I was able to say, "Oh, yes, I know who you are. Clay Fourrier has talked about you." Surprised him.

And to All: I apologize again this issue for skipping people---these comments were done at a gallop. Next issue should be longer with Toronto tales and WorldCon report. I hope to see many of you in Philadelphia, others next time here!

This article ran in the Baton Rouge Advocate recently; I thought it appropriate for a Twain issue.

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The Nerve of Mark Twain

Old Capitol critic lived in architectural oddity

By [DANNY HEITMAN](#)

Advocate staff writer



Photo provided by The Mark Twain House

With its high balconies and decorative brickwork, Mark Twain's Hartford, Conn., home inspired a few double takes when it was being built.

Mark Twain had his nerve.

As every Louisiana school child has been told, Twain didn't care much for the Old State Capitol, citing it as a classic case of Gothic excess.

But when it came to building his own house in Hartford, Conn., Twain wasn't above a little excess himself, creating a structure that one period observer called "one of the oddest looking buildings in the state ever designed for a dwelling, if not in the whole country."

No one's been more surprised by the irony than Polly Henderson, a longtime fan of the Capitol who learned about Twain's eccentric home a few months ago.

Like many local residents, Henderson was well-versed in the famous critique of the Old State Capitol that Twain offered in his 1883 book, "Life on the Mississippi."

The book recounts Twain's steamboat voyage along the Mississippi, a trip that gave him a grand view of the Capitol as he approached Baton Rouge. When Twain saw the building, it was being restored after suffering fire damage during the Civil War.

Twain found the Capitol overdone, and he blamed its appearance on Sir Walter Scott, a popular period author known for historical novels such as "Waverly" and "Ivanhoe."

"Sir Walter Scott is probably responsible for the Capitol building; for it is not conceivable that this little sham castle would ever have been built if he had not run the people mad, a couple of generations ago, with his medieval romances," Twain told readers. "The South has not yet recovered from the debilitating influence of his books."

"It is pathetic enough that a white-washed castle, with turrets and things -- materials all ungentle within and without, pretending to be what they are not -- should ever have been built in this otherwise honorable place; but it is much more pathetic to see this architectural falsehood undergoing restoration and perpetuation in our day, when it would have been so easy to let dynamite finish what a charitable fire began, and then devote this restoration money to something genuine."

Several months ago, Henderson was helping entertain a woman from Hartford when the subject turned to local tourist attractions, including the Old State Capitol. Henderson told the visitor what Twain had said about the Baton Rouge landmark.

"She said, 'That's pretty funny, because I live in Hartford, and you should see Twain's house. It's pretty ugly,'" Henderson recalled.

Shortly after the visitor returned home, she sent Henderson a brochure from The Mark Twain House, which is now open as a museum. Henderson was shocked when she saw a picture of Twain's house -- a flamboyant structure that some have compared to a landlocked riverboat.

"His taste was definitely in his pen," said Henderson. "It looks like a Scandinavian battleship."

"It's got a little bit of everything, but basically, it's Gothic," Twain House spokesman David Bush said in a phone interview. "Some historians have called it High Victorian Gothic."

Completed in 1874, Twain's 26-room mansion features elaborate gingerbread woodwork, a long porch and a decorative brick exterior embellished with bold patterns of black and vermilion paint. For some observers, the home's high balconies seem inspired by Twain's river days.

According to John Boyer, executive director of The Mark Twain House, there is a common misconception that the house was modeled after a Mississippi River steamboat to reflect Twain's career as a riverboat pilot.

"There is no historical evidence that Twain or his architect sought to create that appearance," said Boyer. "The high balconies around the home's third floor might resemble the pilot house of a riverboat, but, in fact, they were installed to take advantage of the sweeping vistas that could be enjoyed from the property."

Bush said that Twain's wife, Olivia, was the guiding hand behind the home's construction. "To be honest, Twain's wife was actually more involved in the design of the home than he was," said Bush. "It was his wife's money that built it. He wasn't all that famous at the time."

But even if Twain took a back seat to Olivia in the home's conception, he seemed an unabashed fan of the result. "He loved the house," Bush said. "The house was very much a symbol that he had arrived. Also, he was a family man, and this is where he enjoyed his family."

"To us, our house was not unsentient matter -- it had a heart, and a soul... it was of us, and we were in its confidence and lived in its grace and the peace of its benediction," Twain wrote in 1896. "We never came from an absence that its face did not light up and speak out its eloquent welcome -- and we could not enter unmoved."

But Twain's hometown newspaper, The Hartford Daily Times, gave a more mixed assessment. "Many of the readers of The Times, doubtless, have had at least an external view of the structure, which has already acquired something beyond a local fame," the newspaper remarked in 1874. "And such persons, we think, will agree with us in the opinion that it is one of the oddest looking buildings in the state ever designed for a dwelling, if not in the whole country."

"It's different," Bush said. "I'm not much for Victorian. I've always liked Greek Revival, which is plainer and more stately. This is a little bit over the top."

Bush, who spent his early years in New Orleans, is familiar with the Old State Capitol and Twain's dislike for it. "The Old State Capitol is Gothic Revival, which is based on historical models, mostly English," Bush said. "The Mark Twain House is what they call High Victorian Gothic." Bush said that High Victorian Gothic draws loosely on precedent while indulging numerous flights of fancy. "You wouldn't find a real Gothic house in England that looks like this house," he added.

What does Bush think of the Old State Capitol?

"I always loved it," he said. "That was probably one of things that made me want to go into historic preservation. It was the castle -- oooh!"

Beyond its eclectic exterior, The Mark Twain House holds other surprises for tourists who walk inside, Bush said.

"I think a lot of people are surprised that the house is as formal as it was -- because when you think of Twain, you think of him as being very rough and tumble and funny," said Bush.

"Actually, when it was built, they didn't have enough money to finish the interior," Bush said.

The home's construction costs exceeded the original budget. For a time, many of the walls in the house were primed, but without paint or paper. In 1881, after the success of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "A Tramp Abroad," Twain and his wife turned to Louis Comfort Tiffany and his firm to complete their home's decor. Today, the house contains one of only two surviving Tiffany-designed domestic interiors that are open to the public.

The rooms amply reflect their Victorian origins, with dark woods, intricate carving and Oriental rugs. "Tiffany used a variety of styles in the different rooms," Bush said. "When you go from room to room, they're very different. Some of the rooms are a bit much for my taste."

In its heyday, the home was a showcase for Twain's literary success. "It always had central heat provided by a furnace," Bush said. "It was one of the first homes in Hartford to get a telephone."

Bad investments had reversed Twain's fortunes by 1891, prompting the family to seek cheaper living arrangements in Europe. In 1896, while Twain and the rest of his family were in England, his daughter, Suzy, returned to Hartford, where she contracted meningitis and died in the family home.

Saddened by the tragedy, the family never occupied the home again. It was sold in 1903, and is now a museum attracting 50,000 visitors a year.

Mary Louise Prudhomme, executive director of the Old State Capitol, said that she became puzzled by Twain's remarks about the Old State Capitol when she researched its history several years ago.

"One of the things I wanted to know was why Mark Twain had said this," Prudhomme recalled. "One reason might have been professional jealousy -- that people were reading more Sir Walter Scott than Mark Twain."

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The original article in the paper showed a nice picture of the old State Capitol, since it didn't show up in the online edition, I borrowed a picture from another site. Here it is in all its glory.



Just as the person quoted in the article, I think it's a lovely place. The interior has a spiral staircase that winds up from a black and white checkered floor to a stained glass ceiling. The building itself is on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. Since hills are rare around here; most children who grew up in the area have fond memories of rolling down the hill beside the Capitol. It's used as a museum dedicated to Louisiana government nowadays, with videos and sound clips of Louisiana politicians. I keep saying I want to go see it since its restoration, but haven't gotten there yet.