



Far Right: Revere House Hotel in Brockville

Above: Rossin House Hotel in Toronto 1885

Left: Clemens and Cable photographed together on tour

THE "TWINNS OF GENIUS" ONTARIO TOUR

By Special Contributor: Brian Porter

Mark Twain and George Washington Cable, two of America's most prominent writers and novelists of the 19th century, arrived in Brockville during an intense snowstorm, on Monday February 16, 1885. Their train was three hours late, delayed by an earlier derailment.

A horse-drawn sleigh brought them to the Revere House hotel on King St. & Market Square where they were met by their manager, Major James Pond, and given a generous dinner, before their performance.

The two famous writers, who billed themselves as the "Twins of Genius," were nearing the end of a gruelling, but lucrative, four-month speaking tour. From November 3, 1884 to February 28, 1885, they did 103 performances in eighty cities, including five cities in Canada.

On December 8 and 9, 1884, in Toronto, they packed the 2500 seat Horticultural Garden Pavilion (now Allan Gardens). The cost was 50c, with reserved seats and an extra 25c at the door for walk-ins. (approximately \$11:50 & \$16:50 in 2019).

They stayed at the upscale Rossin House at the corner of King St. and York St., which was demolished in 1969 to build the T-D Centre.

The tour continued back into Canada in 1885, with shows in London on Friday, February 13, Toronto on the 14th, Brockville on the 16th, Ottawa on the 17th and Montreal on February 18 and 19.

Mark Twain, age 49, from Missouri and George Cable, age 40, from Louisiana, had first met

in 1881. Twain had built up a reputation for humour with novels such as his best-selling *Innocents Abroad* (1869), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881).

George Cable, from New Orleans, wrote about life in the American South, dealing with racism and mixed-race Creole families. His first novel, published in 1881, was entitled *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*. It was an historical romance looking at racial injustice. Cable eventually moved to Massachusetts, when his writing stirred hostility in the South.

Mark Twain, aka: Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was especially concerned to travel in Canada to secure Canadian and British copyright for his upcoming book, that was destined to become his masterpiece, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He had lost thousands of dollars to pirated versions of his work and wanted to prevent Canadian and British publishers from printing a version of the new novel when the American version was published. Both *Prince and the Pauper* and *Huckleberry Finn* were first published in Canada.

There was such great excitement in Brockville to hear Twain and Cable were to perform, the Snowshoe Club even cancelled their outing for that day. The Brockville Evening Recorder for Friday February 13, 1885, announced their appearance at the GRAND OPERA HOUSE – One Night Only – priced at 75c, 50c, and 35c, which would be up in "the Gods" or second balcony.

The Monday edition for February 16 discussed the "Authors as Elocutionists." This was a new form of popular entertainment, with the

authors doing dramatic readings from their novels, bringing characters to life with actions and accents. Charles Dickens had done this to great effect in Great Britain.

The reporter wrote, "Since the character of the theatre has undergone a change which renders it no longer attractive to very many persons, it was only a question of time when a new form of popular entertainment would be developed to meet the general demand..... the author presents his own characters to an audience, illustrating his subjects with various side-lights, such as a song or dialect and thus vividly picturing the scenes he projects with local colour..." They had "great success with a new departure combining literature with the Lyceum..."

Mark Twain was widely known for his deadpan humour and the reporter added that, "the man's appearance is suggestive of humour, but he never laughs at his own wit, which in fact helps to make others laugh more."

The whirlwind tour was nearing the end when they reached Brockville. Twain was becoming annoyed with Cable and in a letter complained about him never buying any paper or envelopes of his own.

They went their separate ways at the end of their tour. Twain continued to write for another twenty-five years, until his death in 1910. Cable continued to write as well until 1925. Brockville's Grand Opera House underwent a major reconstruction in 1911.

To this day the Brockville Arts Centre continues to host many prominent entertainers. **LH**