

Mark Twain Liked Cats Better Than People ~

Yeah, I know Mark Twain wasn't from Berkeley County, South Carolina. But this article is worthy of being repeated . . . not because I like cats ('cause I don't), but because I do like reading about 'funny' things. I'm also curious and very interested in 'names' and how people . . . and animals, get those names. So, I thought you might find this article, written by Kat Eschner in the Smithsonian Magazine, interesting. Check it out and see if you agree.

Mark Twain, AKA Samuel Clemens, turned his signature wit to a number of subjects—boyhood, the legend of King Arthur, and even cats. “If man could be crossed with the cat,” he once wrote, “it would improve man, but it would deteriorate the cat.”

Twain was far from being alone in his love of cats: many famous nineteenth- and twentieth-century American writers kept and loved cats, among them T.S. Eliot, Patricia Highsmith and Ernest Hemingway, according to Sean Hutchison writing for *Mental Floss*. Much like Hemingway's ailurophilia (it means “love of cats”) left a tribe of six-toed kitties in Key West, Twain's interest in cats took its own strange twists and turns. Here's the inside scoop:

He gave them illustrious names. Twain owned up to 19 cats at one time, writes Livius Drusus for *Mental Floss*, “all of whom he loved and respected far beyond whatever he may have felt about people. His cats all bore fantastical titles, among them: Apollinaris, Beelzebub, Blatherskite, Buffalo Bill, Satan, Sin, Sour Mash, Tammany, Zoroaster, Soapy Sal and Pestilence, writes Drusus.

Twain also wrote cats into his fiction. “Cats make cameos in some of his most famous works,” writes the National Portrait Gallery. In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, a cat named Peter features, but he was one of many, writes the gallery.

When he had to be away from his own cats, he'd rent replacements. Throughout his life, when Twain travelled, he would rent cats to take the place of his left-behind companions. “The most famous cat-renting episode occurred in Dublin, New Hampshire, in 1906,” writes Mack Hitch for *New England Today*. “Twain biographer Albert Bigelow Paine was there when the author rented three kittens for the summer. One he named Sackcloth. The other two were identical and went under the joint name of Ashes.” Why rent, you ask? He couldn't travel with the cats, so he'd rent them and then leave behind money to help cover their care during all nine of their lives.

“Once, as he was about to enter the screen door that led into the hall, two kittens ran up in front of him and stood waiting,” Paine told Hitch. “With grave politeness he opened the door, made a low bow, and stepped back and said, ‘Walk in, gentlemen. I always give precedence to royalty.’”

He went above and beyond to try and find his lost cat Bambino. Perhaps Twain’s greatest cat love was Bambino, a cat who had originally been owned by his daughter Clara. After Bambino went missing, Twain used his pen in an attempt to find him. He “took out an advertisement in the *New York American* offering a \$5 reward to return the missing cat to his house at 21 5th Avenue in New York City,” writes Hutchison. Twain’s description of his beloved pet: “Large and intensely black; thick, velvety fur; has a faint fringe of white hair across his chest; not easy to find in ordinary light.” Bambino eventually came home on his own, writes Drusus, but not before numerous people had turned up with cats that might match this artistic description.



Twain poses with a cat in his signature white outfit, circa 1906. *Samuel Clemens / Albert Bigelow Paine / 1906 / National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution / Gift of John Seelye*