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English Professor John Bird Discovers Never-Before-Published Mark Twain Children's Story

Winthrop University

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English Professor John Bird Discovers Never-Before-Published Mark Twain Children's Story

Quick Facts

- Called "The Purloining of Prince Oleomargarine," it is the story of a young boy who eats a flower sprouted by a magical seed and gains the ability to talk to animals.
- Bird said he spotted Twain's notes on the story while visiting the Mark Twain Papers & Project at the University of California at Berkeley in 2011. A noted Twain scholar and author of "Mark Twain and Metaphor" (University of Missouri Press, 2007), Bird quickly recognized their significance.



John Bird

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – A never-before-published Mark Twain children's story discovered by Winthrop University [English Professor John Bird](#) is set for release in September.

Called "**The Purloining of Prince Oleomargarine**," it is the story of a young boy who eats a flower sprouted by a magical seed and gains the ability to talk to animals. From there, the boy and his new animal friends go off on a wild adventure to rescue a kidnapped prince.

Bird said he spotted Twain's notes on the story while visiting the [Mark Twain Papers & Project](#) at the University of California at Berkeley in 2011. While researching Twain's papers for a Twain cookbook, Bird said that the word oleomargarine caught his eye. A noted Twain scholar and author of "[Mark Twain and Metaphor](#)" (University of Missouri Press, 2007), Bird quickly recognized their significance.

Twain told his three young daughters countless bedtime stories, which were made up on the spot each night as they requested them, but the beloved author/humorist was not known to have saved the stories.

With this particular tale, Twain had jotted down notes, but not a story ending. The 16 pages of handwritten notes relate the fairy tale Twain concocted for his young daughters one night in 1879 while the family was staying in Paris, an event he documented in his journal. The fragments were turned over by Bird to **Cindy Lovell**, who was then director of the **Mark Twain House and Museum** in Hartford, Connecticut. The job of finishing the story was entrusted to [Philip and Erin Stead](#), two of today's most notable names in children's literature.

The author-illustrator couple completed the text to make a **152-page illustrated book**, framing it as a story "told to me by my friend, Mr. Mark Twain." It even includes occasional interruptions by an imagined meeting over tea between Philip and Twain.

Frances Gilbert, an associate publishing director at [Random House Books for Young Readers](#), said that publishing a new Twain story is an incredible literary event. "When I first got the chance to read this unpublished Twain story, I couldn't believe what I was holding," she said. "I've admired Erin and Philip Stead's work since their first book and couldn't think of a more ideal match for this project. It's an American dream team."

The Steads are creators of the **Caldecott Medal-winning book** “**A Sick Day for Amos McGee.**” This next latest work, “**The Purloining of Prince Oleomargarine,**” will be released on **Sept. 26** with a 250,000-copy first printing.

For more information, contact **Mary McCue**, assistant director of publicity, at 212/782-9317 or e-mail her at mmccue@penguinrandomhouse.com.

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