MARK TWAIN, NEVADA FRONTIER JOURNALISM, AND
THE TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE:
CRISIS IN CREDIBILITY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

Christopher Wienandt, B.A., M.A., M.I.J.
Denton, Texas
May, 1995
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This dissertation is an attempt to give a picture of the Nevada frontier journalist Samuel L. Clemens and the surroundings in which he worked. It is also an assessment of the extent to which Clemens (and his alter ego Twain) can be considered a serious journalist and the extent to which he violated the very principles he championed.

Chapter 1 discusses the early history of Nevada and the characteristics of Virginia City during the time Mark Twain worked there.

Chapter 2 is an assessment of frontier Nevada newspaper readers' interests. It describes a typical newspaper, then examines the content of three specific newspapers—the Gold Hill Daily News, Virginia Daily Union, and Reese River Reveille—for the issue of December 10, 1863.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, the paper for which Mark Twain worked. The chapter also includes an examination of the Enterprise of January 10, 1863, the only date during Twain's tenure for which a complete copy is extant.
In Chapter 4, Mark Twain’s and Dan De Quille’s careers at the *Enterprise* are examined. It was during this time that the Mark Twain persona made its appearance, so strongly that it ultimately submerged the public identity of Sam Clemens.

Particular examples of Mark Twain’s work are the focus of Chapter 5. His “Petrified Man” and “Bloody Massacre” hoaxes and other pieces, despite the altruistic face he put on them, are shown to be motivated at least in part by petty personal factors that do his journalistic stature no credit.

Chapter 6 is an assessment of Twain’s credibility as a journalist. Despite the rambunctious climate in which he worked, Twain overstepped the boundaries of acceptable practice of his trade. His personal motivations, combined with his protestations that his work furthered noble journalistic principles, show that he could not have had the credibility a journalist—even in the Virginia City of that day—needs.
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CHAPTER 1

MARK TWAIN’S VIRGINIA CITY:
ITS ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT,
AND CHARACTER

Much attention has been focused on the development of Mark Twain as a writer, particularly his metamorphosis from the lighthearted observer of human foibles in Roughing It and The Innocents Abroad to the darkly cynical creator of such late works as No. 44: The Mysterious Stranger. But before Roughing It, before Huckleberry Finn, before A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, there was also a Mark Twain, one upon whom a less intense critical spotlight has been cast. This is the man who emerged from the frontier Nevada mining country to make a name for himself, both figuratively and literally, at the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, the most freewheeling and controversial newspaper in the West in the 1860’s. This is the man who was capable of gentle, self-deprecating humor but was also capable of such strong feelings that he foolishly printed the embarrassing exchange of letters that hastened his sudden departure from Virginia City. This is the man who claimed to be motivated by devotion to the duties of a free press but who allowed his seemingly
most altruistic writings to be tainted by petty personal grievances.

In this dissertation, I try to give a complete picture of the Nevada frontier journalist Samuel L. Clemens—not just a portrait of the man or his work, but also of the historical and professional surroundings in which he worked. I examine the rise of Virginia City, the character of the Western press in the 1860’s, and the nature of the newspapers that Mark Twain read and competed against, as well as the one for which he worked. Finally, I assess the extent to which Clemens (and his alter ego Twain) can be considered a serious journalist and the extent to which he violated the very principles he championed.

Gold Rushes of the 1850’s

To understand the Mark Twain of the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise as fully as possible, it is necessary to examine the society and conditions in which he worked. And to understand the Virginia City of the 1860’s, it is necessary to understand the settling of the Nevada Territory.

The early history of Nevada is almost indistinguishable from the history of the Comstock Lode, a vein of silver ore whose effect on Nevada cannot be overestimated. But the first prospectors in Nevada, during the 1850’s, were interested not in silver but in gold. These pioneers were still intoxicated by the California gold rush of 1849 and its aftershocks. Many were veterans of the frenzies that drove thousands to seek
gold in remote areas of the state. They had prospected at such sites as Gold Lake, which was “reputed to be filled, literally filled, with golden boulders” of gold, according to Effie Mona Mack in *Mark Twain in Nevada* (26); Gold Bluff, in far northwestern California, of which J. Ross Browne says, “It was represented, and generally believed, that any enterprising man could take his hat and a wheel-barrow and in half an hour gather up gold enough to last him for life” (“A Peep at Washoe” 2); and the Kern River, seven hundred miles to the south of Gold Bluff, which drew 5,000 people in the spring of 1855. “The Kern River excitement threatened for a time to depopulate the northern portion of the State,” Browne says (2). By the time of Kern River, Mack says, there had been an average of one gold rush per year since 1849 (27).

The most notorious of the gold rushes was at Fraser River, British Columbia, in 1858. “It became a disease, a fever, an epidemic,” Mack says, as 18,000 people converged on the Fraser River--Browne puts the number at 30,000 (5)--only to find it in a flood stage so persistent that many prospectors ran out of money, starved to death, and were buried in unmarked graves. Eventually the state of California paid out $30,000 to retrieve those remaining (Mack 27). The Fraser River experience was so humiliating, says Browne (5), that “the time arrived when it became a matter of personal offense to ask any spirited gentleman if he had been to Frazer [sic] River.”
Nevada Before the Silver Rush

Although the existence of gold in Nevada (it was actually part of Utah Territory until 1861) was known as early as 1850, the richness of the discoveries was not sufficient to attract a great deal of excitement. Besides, the gold in Gold Canyon, just below the area that was to become Virginia City, was difficult to extract; it was alloyed with a mysterious blue material that some of the miners believed to be lead, and almost all believed to be worthless. Of so little attraction was gold prospecting at the site that in 1850, 60,000 emigrants passed by on their way to California without succumbing to Nevada gold fever, according to George D. Lyman in *The History of the Comstock Lode* (7). As late as 1858, the number of miners in Gold Canyon and Six-mile Canyon, in both of which gold strikes were soon to be made, was just “a hundred or more” (Mack 19).

Early Settlers on the Comstock

The few hardy prospectors who did come to inhabit the site were a colorful bunch; Lyman calls them “a motley throng--the flotsam and jetsam of California’s placers [surface miners]--criminals and outlaws . . . [and] winter-bound immigrants who had left all observance of law east of the Rockies” (12). Among them were James Fennimore (or Fenmore, or Finney), a native Virginian described by Lyman as illiterate, feather-brained, and bibulous (11). Fennimore had fled California after killing a man and, according to Lyman,
had changed his name to Finney, which had become corrupted into "Virginny." It was he who christened Virginia City (Lyman 37). Another early miner, whose name was to become attached to the area’s silver strike, was Henry Thomas Paige Comstock--Henry Tompkins Paige Comstock, according to Mack (16)--a Canadian sheep-herder described by Lyman as a loud-mouthed, haggard, slothful braggart; a “singular genius, unburdened with virtues, a spontaneous being with little conception of right or wrong as abstract principles regulating life” (12).

Myron Angel, in his invaluable History of Nevada (1881), gives this sketch of the situation in 1858:

The search for gold during the year was prosecuted further up the cañon above Johntown, and H.T.P. Comstock, after whom the great lode was named, passed the season operating with poor success, working Pah-Utes in the American Flat Wash. To the north, in Six-mile Cañon, a number of parties worked, among whom were Fenmore, known as “Old Virginia,” after whose nickname Virginia City was christened, Peter O’Riley, Patrick McLaughlin, and Emanuel Penrod. A saloon was there, and a restaurant, where board could be had at fourteen dollars per week, both institutions the property of Nicholas Ambrosia, known as “Dutch Nick.”¹ When the winter set in, and the cold weather shut down
placer mining, Six-mile Cañon was abandoned for the general rendezvous at Johntown [in Gold Canyon].

(51)

On January 28, 1859, prospecting resumed and gold was found at the head of Gold Canyon in a vein that appeared increasingly rich as its exploration progressed (Angel 55-56). News of the find spread among the prospectors, who soon gathered at the site and staked out a maze of claims, a situation that would only become more entangled during the next several years. Old Virginny, who had discovered the site, named it Gold Hill. Also among the earliest claimants were Comstock, who by this time was known as "Old Pancake"; Sandy Bowers (the "miraculously ignorant" John Smith of Roughing It), who had come to the territory along with Old Virginny as a teamster during the Mormon migration in the early part of the decade; and Jim Rogers, who gave up his claim adjacent to Sandy Bowers's to boarding-house keeper Eilley Orrum Cowan (she would soon become Mrs. Bowers). Dutch Nick moved his restaurant and bar to Gold Hill to take advantage of this small-scale gold rush (Mack 19).

That June, in Six-mile Canyon, Patrick McLaughlin and Peter O’Riley made a sizable discovery of gold on ground Comstock immediately asserted, on questionable authority, that he had staked out as his, Emanuel Penrod’s, and Old Virginny’s. For whatever reason, the discoverers agreed to include Comstock in their claim.
Comstock's odd interpretation of ethics becomes evident in the fact that after insisting that Old Virginny be included in the claim, he promptly rode into Gold Hill and, in effect, swindled him out of his share in return for a broken-down mustang, $40, and a bottle of whiskey. On the other hand, as the claim proved more and more productive, Comstock lavished portions of it on such acquaintances as William Chollar, Abe Curry, Alvah Gould, and others; all of these sites would prove to be fabulously rich (Mack 21).

**Discovery of Silver**

Even as these miners tenaciously prospected for gold throughout the 1850's, two other equally tenacious young men were working to determine just what the bluish material was that so aggravated the miners by clogging up their equipment. Ethan Allen and Hosea Ballou Grosch (in Angel, spelled "Grosh"), two well-educated Pennsylvanians who were the sons of a Universalist minister, had gone west in 1849 to seek their fortune (Mack 13). They had briefly visited the Carson Valley in what was then Utah Territory in 1851 and in 1853 had returned to prospect more widely in sites including Gold Canyon. Knowing something of metallurgy, they were better prepared than the vast majority of other prospectors to realize that the accursed blue material was not really worthless at all but was, in fact, silver. In letters home to their father, they detailed their discoveries and the knowledge they were acquiring about methods of testing their
value. In one, they described a find in Gold Canyon as
"carbonate of silver"--a
dark gray mass, tarnished, probably, by the
sulphuric acid in the water. It resembles thin
sheet lead, broken very fine--and lead the miners
supposed it to be. . . . Other ore of silver we
think we have found in the cañon, and a rock called
black rock--very abundant--we think contains
silver. (quoted in an 1879 letter of A.B. Grosch to
friends in California, itself quoted in Angel 52)

Financial difficulties prevented the brothers from
returning to their mining sites until 1857 (it was impossible
to carry on mining during the harsh winters, which they spent
in California). Even when they did manage to return, they
lived in extreme poverty, spending every hour that could be
spared in mining enough gold to subsist. During this season,
tragedy struck: Hosea accidentally drove his pick into his
foot on August 19; complications set in, and he died
September 2 at the age of 31. Allen was delayed in setting
out to return to California for the winter; he and his
companion, R.M. Bucke, did not leave until November 15 and
even then were delayed when on the first night their mule
wandered away from camp and headed back to the mining
settlement. As a result, they became snowbound in the
mountains, had to kill their mule for food and discard their
baggage and specimens, and trudged onward on foot, sleeping
at night in their blankets under the snow. After four days without food, they were discovered by a party of miners hunting deer. Both men's legs were severely frostbitten; Bucke underwent amputation of one leg and part of the other foot. Allen, however, could not be saved. He died December 19, 1857.

Comstock and His Claims

The story of the Grosch brothers would constitute no more than a poignant footnote were it not for one fact. Before setting out for California, Allen Grosch had entrusted his cabin and its contents—including a sealed box containing his assaying equipment, some mineral specimens, notes, and drawings of his claims—to Henry Comstock (Lyman 22). After learning the next spring that Grosch had died, Comstock appropriated to himself the contents of the box and, realizing that the contents indicated a rich discovery but not realizing that the discovery was of silver rather than gold, began staking out every possible claim he thought the Grosches might have been prospecting (Lyman 30-31). It was by this means that Comstock could try to justify his stake in other miners' gold discoveries, as a result of which his name became permanently attached to the region.

Boom Days for Virginia City

But it was silver whose discovery set off the frenzy of prospecting that led to the boom days of Virginia City. This second discovery--the one that did not die with its
discoverer—was made by a man named either W.P. Morrison (according to Angel), B.A. Harrison (Lyman 38), or Augustus Harrison (Dan De Quille, *The Big Bonanza*, 33; Mack 22). These authorities disagree not only on the name but also on the exact circumstances of the situation. Angel says Morrison was a rancher visiting the mining district who became intrigued with the blue material the miners were discarding and, with his friend J.F. Stone, took the material to Nevada City, California, to have it assayed (60). Lyman relates that it was Stone who visited the mining site and gave Harrison specimens to take to an assayer's office in Grass Valley, California (38). De Quille says that Harrison was a Nevada rancher who visited the diggings, took a piece of ore on a visit to California, and gave it to Judge James Walsh of Grass Valley, who had it assayed at the office of Melville Atwood. Mack's version (22) is that Harrison visited the mining site, returned to the ranch where he worked, and told Stone that he had heard rumors from Mexican miners that the rock was rich in silver. According to this version, Stone took Harrison's specimens to a newspaper office in Nevada City; the editor passed them along to Judge Walsh, who had them assayed. What seems certain is that upon learning the results of the assay—which revealed that the samples were rich in gold but even richer in silver—Walsh and a companion, Joseph Woodworth, headed immediately for the Virginia City area. The results of the assay became widely,
and quickly, known; although all involved agreed to keep the news strictly secret, apparently each had an intimate friend upon whose discretion he could rely, and each friend had other such friends. The result was that Walsh and Woodworth were followed by a trail of fortune seekers that within days numbered in the hundreds (Angel 61).

J. Ross Browne’s “Peep at Washoe”

Probably the most accurate, and certainly the most colorful, report of these early days of the Washoe silver rush is given by J. Ross Browne in “A Peep at Washoe” in the December, 1860, and January and February, 1861, issues of Harper’s New Monthly Magazine. This profusely illustrated report of the author’s trek from San Francisco to Carson City and Virginia City and back during March and April of 1860 is a wry but realistic look at the miserable conditions the thousands of would-be millionaires faced in their quest for wealth. The writing is clearly in the literary vein that Mark Twain would mine so successfully in his travel books; Browne’s granddaughter-in-law and the editor of his letters, Lina Ferguson Browne, notes that critics see Browne’s influence not only in Twain’s works but also in Melville’s (one of Browne’s early works is Etchings of a Whaling Cruise, which Melville reviewed) (xix-xx).

Browne found conditions abominable both on the road to Washoe and in its principal cities. The flood of people intent on making a fortune in Nevada’s silver grounds was
just short of incredible, and this crush of humanity strained available resources to the breaking point—sometimes beyond. The miserable conditions that met the traveler are a constant refrain in Browne, beginning at the start of his journey. As he tells it:

On my arrival in Placerville [California, the jumping-off point for West Coast treasure-hunters] I found the whole town in commotion. There was not an animal to be had at any of the stables without applying three days in advance. The stage for Strawberry had made its last trip in consequence of the bad condition of the road. Every hotel and restaurant was full to overflowing. The streets were blocked up with crowds of adventurers all bound for Washoe. The gambling and drinking saloons were crammed to suffocation with customers practicing for Washoe. The clothing stores were covered with placards offering to sell goods at ruinous sacrifices to Washoe miners. The forwarding houses and express offices were overflowing with goods and packages marked for Washoe. . . . The newspapers were full of Washoe. In short, there was nothing but Washoe to be seen, heard, or thought of. (7)

Once Browne was truly under way, he discovered that conditions at Placerville were quite pleasant compared with
what was to come. The trail itself, as much a victim of the spring thaw as were the travelers, seemed impassable, yet thousands of travelers traversed it every day. Browne describes it as "five feet deep by 130 miles long . . . composed chiefly of mountains, snow, and mud" (295). One section of it, for instance, the road from Placerville to Strawberry, is for the most part graded, and no doubt is a very good road in summer; but it would be a violation of conscience to recommend it in the month of April. The melting of the accumulated snows of the past winter had partially washed it away, and what remained was deeply furrowed by the innumerable streams that sought an outlet in the ravines. In many places it seemed absolutely impracticable for wheeled vehicles; but it is an article of faith with California teamsters that wherever a horse can go a wagon can follow. There were some exceptions to this rule, however, for the road was literally lined with broken-down stages, wagons, and carts, presenting every variety of aspect, from the general smash-up to the ordinary capsize. (10)

The procession along the trail was a curious sight, consisting of a wide variety of nationalities, occupations, and physical types. Again, Browne describes it best:
An almost continuous string of Washoeites stretched "like a great snake dragging its slow length along" as far as the eye could reach. In the course of this day's tramp we passed parties of every description and color: Irishmen, wheeling their blankets, provisions, and mining implements on wheelbarrows; American, French, and German foot-passengers, leading heavily-laden horses, or carrying their packs on their backs, and their picks and shovels slung across their shoulders; Mexicans, driving long trains of pack-mules, and swearing fearfully, as usual, to keep them in order; dapper-looking gentlemen, apparently from San Francisco, mounted on fancy horses; women, in men's clothes, mounted on mules or "burros"; . . . in short, every imaginable class, and every possible species of industry, was represented in the moving pageant. It was a striking and impressive spectacle to see, in full competition with youth and strength, the most pitiable specimens of age and decay--white-haired old men, gasping for breath as they dragged their palsied limbs after them in the exciting race of avarice; cripples and hunchbacks; even sick men from their beds--all stark mad for silver. (12)
This somewhat bedraggled group was counterbalanced by a fully bedraggled group trudging the opposite direction, returning empty-handed from the silver quest. "The difference in the expression of the incoming and the outgoing was very remarkable; being about the difference between a man with fifty dollars in his pocket and one who wished to borrow that amount . . . . Among the latter there was a mingled expression of sadness and sarcasm as if they were rather inclined to the opinion that some people had not yet seen the elephant" (298-99).

If conditions along the trail were bad, conditions at the lodging houses were not any better. At one spot called Dirty Mike's, "we found a ruinously dilapidated frame shanty, the bar, of course being the main feature. Next to the bar was the public bedroom, in which there was every accommodation except beds, bedding, chairs, tables, and washstands . . . ." (11). As for Dirty Mike himself, "I would cheerfully give him a recommendation if he would only wash his face and his plates once or twice a week" (11). Another stopping place was no better; "We found here several hundred people, bound in both directions, and passed a very rough night, trying to get a little sleep amidst the motley and noisy crowd" (149).

Once he arrived in the mining country, Browne was not overly impressed; considering the journey he had just made, he was probably in no mood to be impressed, although Carson
City, where he intended to open an agency, was acceptable in some respects.

It is really quite a pretty and thrifty little town. Situated within a mile of the foot-hills, within reach of the main timber region of the country, and well watered by streams from the mountains, it is rather imposing on first acquaintance; but the climate is abominable, and not to be endured. I know of none so bad except that of Virginia City, which is infinitely worse.

(150)

Browne’s assessment of the rival settlements of Virginia City and Carson City is, to say the least, not generous. Although he does not speak harshly of Carson City at first sight, he sums it up as “a mere accident; occupation of the inhabitants, waylaying strangers bound for Virginia [City]; business, selling whisky, and so dull at that, men fall asleep in the middle of the street going from one groggery to another; productions, grass and weeds on the Plaza” (151).

Virginia City, on the other hand, he finds to be “a mud-hole; climate, hurricanes and snow; water, a dilution of arsenic, plumbago, and copperas; wood, none at all except sage brush; no title to property, and no property worth having” (151).
So great is Browne’s antipathy toward Virginia City that he builds an extended conceit upon the city, which is located just beyond a formation called the Devil’s Gate, as hell.

As I passed through the Devil’s Gate it struck me that there was something ominous in the name. “Let all who enter here—” But I had already reached the other side. It was too late now for repentance. I was about to inquire where the devil—Excuse me, I use the word in no indecorous sense. I was simply about to ask where he lived, when, looking up the road, I was amidst the smoke and din of shivered rock, where grimy imps were at work blasting for ore, a string of adventurers laden with picks, shovels, and crowbars; kegs of powder, frying-pans, pitchforks, and other instruments of torture—all wearily toiling in the same direction; decrepit old men, with avarice imprinted upon their furrowed brows; Jews and Gentiles, foot-weary and haggard; the young and the old, the strong and the weak, all alike burning with an unhallowed lust for lucre; and then I shuddered as the truth flashed upon me that they were going straight to—Virginia City (152-53).

He is equally uncomplimentary in describing Virginia City’s surroundings:
This district is said to be exceedingly rich in gold, and I fancy it may well be so, for it is certainly rich in nothing else. A more barren-looking and forbidding spot could scarcely be found elsewhere on the face of the earth. The whole aspect of the country indicates that it must have been burned up in hot fires many years ago and reduced to a mass of cinders; or scraped up from all the desolate spots in the known world, and thrown over the Sierra Nevada Mountains in a confused mass to be out of the way. I do not wish to be understood as speaking disrespectfully of any of the works of creation; but it is inconceivable that this region should ever have been designed as an abode for man (153).

Browne describes the city itself at length—and in most negative terms. This is not a warts-and-all description; it is, for the most part, just warts.

Frame shanties, pitched together as if by accident; tents of canvas, of blankets, of brush, of potato-sacks and old shirts, with empty whisky barrels for chimneys; smoky hovels of mud and stone; coyote holes in the mountain-side forcibly seized and held by men; pits and shafts with smoke issuing from every crevice; piles of goods and rubbish on craggy points, in the hollows, on the rocks, in the mud,
in the snow, every where, scattered broadcast in pell-mell confusion, as if the clouds had suddenly rained down the dregs of all the flimsy, rickety, filthy little hovels and rubbish of merchandise that had ever undergone the process of evaporation from the earth since the days of Noah. The intervals of space, which may or may not have been streets, were dotted over with human beings of such sort, variety, and numbers that the famous ant-hills of Africa were as nothing in comparison. To say that they were rough, muddy, unkempt and unwashed, would be but faintly expressive of their actual appearance; they were all this by reason of exposure to the weather; but they seemed to have caught the very diabolical tint and grime of the whole place (154-55).

This disreputable crowd Browne finds variously engaged in a brawl over the ownership of a mining claim; discussion of the state of affairs of local mining stocks; gossiping; bargaining; and drinking (“monte-dealers, gamblers, thieves, cut-throats, and murderers were mingling miscellaneously in the dense crowds gathered around the bars of the drinking saloons” (155-56)).2

All this time the wind blew in terrific gusts from the four quarters of the compass, tearing away signs, capsizing tents, scattering the grit from
the gravel-banks with blinding force in every body's eyes, and sweeping furiously around every crook and corner in search of some sinner to smite.

. . . Yet, in the midst of the general wreck and crash of matter, the business of trading in claims, "bucking," and "bearing" went on as if the zephyrs of Virginia were as soft and balmy as those of San Francisco (156).

Virginia City in Mark Twain's Day

Between the time of Browne's visit in the spring of 1860 and Sam Clemens's arrival in Virginia City in September of 1862, Virginia City had grown remarkably in population and in the accommodations it offered, although its level of sophistication still left much to be desired, and of course the climate and setting of the city remained equally unpleasant.

By 1862, according to Paul Fatout in Mark Twain in Virginia City, the ragtag town that Browne describes had turned into a thriving city of somewhere near 7,000 people, "well on its way to becoming a sagebrush metropolis" (8). It "seethed and swarmed with miners, mine-owners, and adventurers--riotous, rollicking children of fortune, always ready to drink and make merry," as Albert Bigelow Paine described the scene in Mark Twain: A Biography (207). By mid-1863, the city could claim three papers with circulation totaling 1,400 daily; an opera house, capacity 1,600, visited
by traveling companies that performed Shakespeare as well as more contemporary works; and a well-patronized library. The more hopeful of its residents expected it to become the second-largest city on the West Coast; the extremely optimistic hoped it would surpass San Francisco (Fatout 75). Mark Twain himself describes the Virginia City he knew in Roughing It:

Virginia had grown to be the "livest" town, for its age and population, that America had ever produced. The sidewalks swarmed with people—to such an extent, indeed, that it was generally no easy matter to stem the human tide. The streets themselves were just as crowded with quartz wagons, freight teams and other vehicles. The procession was endless. So great was the pack, that buggies frequently had to wait half an hour for an opportunity to cross the principal street. Joy sat on every countenance, and there was a glad, almost fierce, intensity in every eye, that told of the money-getting schemes that held sway in every heart. Money was as plenty as dust; every individual considered himself wealthy, and a melancholy countenance was nowhere to be seen. There were military companies, fire companies, brass bands, banks, hotels, theatres, "hurdy-gurdy houses," wide-open gambling palaces, political pow-
wows, civic processions, street fights, murders, inquests, riots, a whiskey mill every fifteen steps, a Board of Aldermen, a Mayor, a City Surveyor, a City Engineer, a Chief of the Fire Department, with First, Second and Third Assistants, a Chief of Police, City Marshal and a large police force, two Boards of Mining Brokers, a dozen breweries and half a dozen jails and station houses in full operation, and some talk of building a church. (302-3)

Twain’s remark about the church is, of course, an exaggeration, but not much of one. According to Angel, “In August, 1862, [about the time Sam Clemens arrived in town] Virginia City had a population of 2,704 inhabitants, which was estimated to exceed 3,000 at the beginning of winter. It had three churches, a Court House, and several flourishing schools” (572). The first church to be built in Virginia City, Angel says (208), was a modest wooden Methodist Episcopal chapel, constructed in the summer of 1861 at a cost of $2,000. The church counted only fifty-one members, and its Sunday school classes enrolled fifty students. However, the church’s membership had doubled by 1866, by which time it occupied a large, elegant brick structure that had been built at a cost of $45,000 and was dedicated February 14, 1864. (This building was wrecked about 1870 by one of the “Washoe zephyrs” to which Browne referred.)
Apparently entertainment was more popular in Virginia City than was religion. Angel calls prize fights "not uncommon" (though illegal), remarking that space allows him to list only a few (582). Entertainment of a somewhat higher caliber was available at Maguire's Opera House, a 54-foot by 100-foot structure built in 1863 by Tom Maguire, who also owned a successful opera house in San Francisco. At Maguire's the same prestigious productions appeared that he booked for his San Francisco theater (Mack 285), including the famous actress Adah Isaacs Menken in her notorious role as the title character in Mazeppa. Nor was Maguire's the only stage venue; by 1863, Mack says, "there were as many as five companies and six or seven variety troupes showing on the Lode at the same time" (285).

Virginia City's Violence

If culture was an aspiration of Virginia City, violence was a characteristic of it, as Twain himself recounts in chapters 48 and 49 of Roughing It. In fact, he says, "To attempt a portrayal of that era and that land, and leave out the blood and carnage, would be like portraying Mormondom and leaving out polygamy" (343). Murder was rampant and was often committed with slight or no provocation; killers often went unpunished. "The best known names in the Territory of Nevada were those belonging to these long-tailed heroes of the revolver," Twain says (344). "Orators, Governors, capitalists and leaders of the legislature enjoyed a degree of fame, but
it seemed local and meagre when contrasted with the fame of such men as Sam Brown, Jack Williams, Billy Mulligan, Farmer Pease . . . etc., etc. There was a long list of them."

Sam Brown is as good an example of the bad man as any, a "great, thick-witted, human Saurian with a booming voice and red side-whiskers which he kept tied under his chin," a man who had killed fifteen people even before coming to Washoe (Lyman 54). In the winter of 1860, after his arrival, he killed another sixteen (76). Brown himself was eventually gunned down, ambushed along a trail by a man he had threatened to murder. Brown’s killer, an innkeeper named Henry Van Sickle, had Brown buried at his own expense. A jury reached the verdict in Brown’s death that “It served him right” (Mack 57).

Such was the nature of violence in Nevada at large; within Virginia City itself, Fatout comments with uncharacteristic abandon, “A spirit of macabre recklessness made life almost as cheap as it is on the modern highway” (87). Twain quotes from the Territorial Enterprise to prove the point:

FATAL SHOOTING AFFRAY.—An affray occurred, last evening, in a billiard saloon on C street, between Deputy Marshal Jack Williams [Twain’s italics] and Wm. Brown, which resulted in the immediate death of the latter. There had been some difficulty between the parties for several months. (Roughing It 347)
This Jack Williams, Twain tells us, "had the common reputation of being a burglar, a highwayman, and a desperado." Within a year of the above item's appearance, Twain says, Williams too was gunned down (348).

A further indication of violence is found in a letter Clemens wrote on April 11-12, 1863, to his mother and sister: "I have just heard five pistol shots down street--as such things are in my line, I will go and see about it." Later in the same letter he writes: "The pistol did its work well--one man--a Jackson County Missourian, shot two of my friends, (police officers,) through the heart--both died within three minutes. Murderer's name is John Campbell" (Sketches 244).

**Virginia City's Obsession with Silver**

At the heart of Virginia City's existence was, of course, silver, and silver motivated much of what went on in the town. As Lyman says:

> Beneath their feet they [residents of the Comstock Lode] saw a network of silver strands widening into solid wedges. The soberest-minded were dazzled by the vision. The fancy of the imaginative ran wild. No metaphor could exaggerate the prevailing delirium. (216)

At the time Twain lived in Virginia City, the situation had changed little from when Browne observed during his visit to Virginia City that
Groups of keen speculators were huddled around the corners, in earnest consultation about the rise and fall of stocks; rough customers with red and blue flannel shirts, were straggling in from the Flowery Diggings, the Desert, and other rich points, with specimens ofcroppings in their hands, or offering bargains in the "Rogers," the "Lady Bryant," the "Mammoth," the "Woolly Horse," and Heaven knows how many other valuable leads, at prices varying from ten to seventy-five dollars a foot. . . . Nobody seemed to have any money, yet every body was a millionaire in silver claims. Nobody had any credit, yet every body bought thousands of feet of glittering ore. Sales were made . . . at the most astounding figures--but not a dime passed hands. All was silver underground, and deeds and mortgages on top; silver, silver every where, but scarce a dollar in coin. The small change had somehow gotten out of the hands of the public into the gambling saloons. (155-56)

During Twain's time on the Territorial Enterprise, mining stocks were handed out to reporters like bubble gum to boys at a barber shop. "New claims were taken up daily," he writes in Roughing It, "and it was the friendly custom to run straight to the newspaper offices, give the reporter forty or fifty 'feet,' and get them to go and examine the mine and
publish a notice of it" (307-8). Mining stocks were almost as
good as cash; in some ways they were treated even more
lightly. Twain writes that at least half his mining stock was
given to him by people who "looked for nothing more than a
simple verbal 'thank you;' and you were not even obliged by
law to furnish that" (309).

If you are coming up the street with a couple of
baskets of apples in your hands, and you meet a
friend, you naturally invite him to take a few.
That describes the condition of things in Virginia
in the "flush times." Every man had his pockets
full of stock, and it was the actual custom of the
country to part with small quantities of it to
friends without the asking. (309)

This, then, was the milieu in which Twain entered the
business of professional writing: a violent, freewheeling
frontier boom-town society perched on a windblown
mountainside, trying, at least in some measure, to struggle
its way toward respectability. When Sam Clemens arrived at
the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, the city was just
three years old, yet it had thousands of inhabitants who had
visions of its rivaling San Francisco in splendor and
importance. It was awash in wealth—and with people who
little knew how to handle it. Its isolated position and rowdy
population left it far removed from the need to observe the
refinements taken for granted in more settled communities even as it experienced an influx of ever more sophisticated residents. This incongruous mix of elements was reflected in the journalism that it produced, a combination of honest, factual news—local comings and goings, births and deaths, along with news of the Civil War and other national events—and outrageously imaginative pieces of the kind that first brought a measure of notoriety to Mark Twain.
NOTES

1 "Dutch Nick" would later become a central figure in Mark Twain's infamous "Bloody Massacre" hoax.

2 It must be noted, however, that Angel's description of Virginia City bears little resemblance to the motley settlement that Browne describes: "In 1859 Virginia City had but two or three houses, and these were stone cabins; a year latter [sic] the place had quite a metropolitan appearance. The International Hotel had the usual bar-room, dining-room, kitchen and twelve sleeping rooms. . . . The receipts of the hotel for the first day after opening were $700" (571).

3 Angel puts the population about this time around 2,700 (572); John Lauber, in The Making of Mark Twain, puts it at 15,000 (108). David C. Coulson puts it at 30,000, apparently citing Fatout as his source. But Coulson's article, marked by misspellings, typographical errors, bad writing, and plagiarism, does not inspire a great deal of confidence.

4 Advertisements in Virginia City newspapers show that residents were in the market for books and pianos as well as for guns and mining tools (see Chapter 2).
CHAPTER 2

NEVADA NEWSPAPER JOURNALISM IN THE 1860’S

Interests of Washoe Readers

The early days of Nevada were admittedly violent and lawless, and contemporary newspapers reflected that fact. But there was more to frontier Nevada than fistfights, stabbings, and gunplay, as the newspapers also attest. Violence received its due in print, but papers also carried foreign, national, and regional news, as well as reports of social happenings, humorous items, and even poetry. As Barbara Cloud points out in The Business of Newspapers on the Western Frontier, the gold rush of 1849 brought a surprisingly literate population to the West (12). She notes that literacy in the West remained high: “In 1880, when 9.4 percent of the U.S. population was listed as illiterate, the percentage in most of the West fell well below 9.0, in Montana as low as 2.2.” This was an audience that could understand news and could appreciate the lively writing that sometimes found its way into print, in papers such as the Gold Hill Daily News, the Reese River Reveille, and the Territorial Enterprise.

If Virginia City’s newspapers reflected the town’s violent exuberance, they also illustrated its aspirations to civilization. The very fact of the local newspapers’
existence is a token of those aspirations, but their content is even more revealing. To judge by what newspapers offered them to read, early Nevadans maintained an interest in national affairs as well as local ones, and they were not unaware of goings-on as far away as Europe. As Cloud observes, Western readers were intensely interested in local news: "births, deaths, marriages, meetings, formation of fire departments, parties, theater, mineral discoveries—whatever came to hand that publishers thought would interest their readers" (150). For Nevada newspapers, a large part of local coverage was keeping readers apprised of business doings in a society whose engine was business. After all, Virginia City might never have existed but for its location atop the vastly rich Comstock Lode. And indeed, mining news and mining-related advertisements play an extremely significant part in the city's papers. Typically, in addition to any mining news contained in a four-page issue, mining-related advertisements (notices of assessments being levied or of sales of stocks whose owners have failed to pay their assessments) consume the majority of the paper's back page.

Of less immediate but still vital interest to Virginia City readers was news of the Civil War. This news was obtained sometimes by telegraph, sometimes by Pony Express, sometimes by quoting the West Coast papers that had priority access to telegraphic news. As Twain sketchily explains in Roughing It, other newspapers were forbidden to publish
telegraphic news until the day after it had appeared in the coastal papers (407). Cloud explains that the San Francisco Bulletin and the Sacramento Union got preferential treatment by paying the Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company "a rumored $500 a month" (128). The war news in both the Virginia Daily Union and Gold Hill Daily News of December 10, 1863, for instance, is quoted from the Sacramento Union. Other news, too, arrived by telegraph: national political and financial news from the East Coast, via the West Coast, and, apparently when the mails were expected to prove too slow, late-breaking reports on the doings of the state or territorial government from Carson City.

Newspaper Exchanges

Much news in Nevada frontier newspapers was reprinted from other papers, the bulk of it coming not from telegraphic reports but from the institution of the newspaper exchange. The newspaper exchange was not an organization such as, say, the Associated Press; it was, rather, an informal but widespread network of newspapers that subscribed to each other for the purpose of exchanging information. The exchange system had been established long before the opening of the far western frontier. In fact, according to Frank Luther Mott in American Journalism, colonial co-postmasters Benjamin Franklin and William Hunter, both newspaper publishers, introduced postal regulations in 1758 that provided for free exchange of newspapers among publishers through the mail
After independence, the Post Office Act of 1792 reasserted the principle of free exchange of newspapers, a necessary step since many local postmasters had ignored the previous regulation, charging exchange newspapers postage in defiance of the law (160-61).

Cloud, discussing the importance of the postal system to frontier newspapers, explains that publishers counted on the mails to bring news. The western press devoted a substantial amount of its space to local happenings, but publishers knew that readers relied on their newspapers for news of people and places they had left behind when they came west. The exchange of newspapers helped fill this need by serving as a national news service in the pre-telegraph era. Western newspapermen exchanged papers with their eastern counterparts, and each clipped and freely reprinted stories. (122)

Examination of Nevada newspapers, in particular, shows that they not only relied on the exchanges for Eastern news; in fact, a good deal of exchange news seems to have come from regional papers rather than those from the East. This was true on the frontier even after telegraph lines had begun appearing, because much that newspapers felt necessary to report was clipped from papers published in locations the telegraph had not yet reached. The first telegraph line reached Virginia City, from Placerville, California, in 1858,
but it was not until 1861 that the first transcontinental line was strung. Denver got telegraph service in 1863, Portland and Seattle in 1864; Eureka, California, was connected in 1873 and Silver City, Idaho, the next year (Cloud 126). Certainly, the more remote the location, the later telegraph service was established. Thus, except for strictly local news, exchanges were a supremely important source of information. The Virginia Daily Union of December 10, 1863, for example, offers stories clipped from the Reese River Reveille² (five items), the Dalles Mountaineer, the Marysville Express, the Sacramento Union, and the Stockton Independent, and, from farther away, the Chicago Tribune, the Illinois State Register, the Louisville Journal, the New Orleans Era, the New York Sun, the New York Times, and an unidentified “Rebel paper.”

To modern scholars, the frontier newspaper exchanges have proved to be invaluable. Much of what is known of Mark Twain’s early work has been found quoted in other papers; the exchanges have provided the only source for these items, one set of Territorial Enterprise files having been destroyed by a massive fire in Virginia City in 1875, two others in fires resulting from the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 (Edgar Marquess Branch and Robert H. Hirst, eds., The Works of Mark Twain: Early Tales & Sketches, Vol. 1 18). The exchanges were also important in the early development of Mark Twain’s reputation, especially when newspapers subscribing to the
Territorial Enterprise as part of their exchange quoted his hoaxes as fact. (The hoaxes will be discussed in Chapter 5.)

The Typical Frontier Newspaper

Typically, the Nevada frontier newspapers of the early 1860's were four pages long (they sometimes published supplements, however), although the page size, and the width and number of columns were not standard. Even during the course of one paper's lifetime, its size and format were likely to vary; in his History of Nevada, Myron Angel lists the metamorphoses of the Territorial Enterprise from its founding in 1859 up to the time of his book's publication in 1881, from a twenty-column publication printed on 21-by-28-inch pages to a thirty-six-column paper on whopping 28-by-42-inch pages as of October 28, 1863, trimming back to a more modest thirty-two columns on 24-by-36-inch pages in 1881, not to mention the variations between these dates (317). Other newspapers shrank and grew similarly.

Despite the variations in size, the newspapers seem to have followed a similar format. The majority of the first page was devoted to advertising, with whatever space remained going to items of news or entertainment. The Gold Hill Daily News of December 10, 1863, for instance, devotes five of its six columns on page one to advertisements; the Virginia Daily Union of the same date fills five of its eight front-page columns with ads; and the Reese River Reveille of the same date has no news whatsoever on its front page—all five
columns contain advertisements. Though there is some sense of organization to the news inside these papers, their front pages (excluding the Reveille's) are a hodgepodge of stories encompassing war news, correspondence from California, maudlin poetry, humor by Artemus Ward, and a few local items.

Both inside and out, these newspapers are typical of frontier newspapers in appearance. According to Cloud,

'Pages were almost solid type, relieved occasionally in the news columns by capital letters and sometimes italic or bold type, and in the advertising columns by as much variety of type faces and sizes as facilities allowed. Headlines were either nonexistent . . . or merely labels. . . . To the nineteenth-century newspaper printer, it was often enough to have a clean-appearing page, free from typographical errors, broken type, and smudged ink. Competition was played out in forms other than a handsome appearance. (100-101)

Inside, the papers follow a common pattern. Page two of each paper contains unsigned editorial comment in the left-hand column, national or general news in the remaining news columns, and more advertisements in the remaining space (the ratio of advertising to news varies, presumably according to the amount of advertising sold on a particular day). Page three contains items gathered by the local reporter, or "local" (in which capacity Sam Clemens was hired to work at
the Territorial Enterprise), sometimes some additional news of the same type as on the preceding page, and more advertisements. Page four is mostly or wholly paid notices of assessments or of sales of stock on which the assessments are in arrears; what space remains, if any, contains “filler” material—expendable items with no significant news peg.

A look at some individual issues of the newspapers of the time gives a more complete picture of what early Nevada editors found newsworthy. Three such papers are The Virginia Daily Union, The Gold Hill Daily News, and the Reese River Reveille of December 10, 1863 (a day chosen because all three newspapers from the date are extant). The Union and the Daily News were papers that competed directly with the Territorial Enterprise, which is not extant for the date chosen; the Reveille was a prominent paper in another lively mining district and thus is appropriate for comparison. The Territorial Enterprise itself will be examined in the next chapter.³

**Gold Hill Daily News**

The Gold Hill Daily News’ front page for December 10, 1863, consists primarily of advertisements; they fill five of its six columns. These include sixteen notices of mining assessments and seven announcing stockholders’ meetings (a good indication of the driving force behind Virginia City’s existence); ads for dry goods stores, assayers, stage lines, blacksmiths; and “professional cards” of dentists, doctors,
lawyers, stockbrokers and others. The proprietor of N. Myer's Dry Goods Bazaar, in an ad that consumes approximately half a column, announces: "I BEG LEAVE TO INFORM THE LADIES of Gold Hill and vicinity that I have just received the largest, most recherché stock of FANCY DRY GOODS Ever offered in this city; ... In fact, the very best selected stock of Fancy and Dry Goods in the Territory can be found at this PERFECT PALACE OF FASHION." Dr. Hewlett, surgeon dentist, "OFFERS HIS PROFESSIONAL SERVICES to the citizens of Gold Hill and vicinity. After an experience of fifteen years, he feels assured that he can give entire satisfaction, in any operation pertaining to the dental art, [and] would respectfully solicit your patronage." (Cloud remarks that such deference was typical of advertising of the time (62).) Dr. Th. Ehrenberg "PAYS SPECIAL ATTENTION TO LADIES' and Children's Diseases" and holds "Consultations in English, French and the German languages." V. Butsch, blacksmith, promises:

ALL KINDS OF IRON-WORK EXECUTED with neatness and dispatch.

Other ads similarly proper, some even deferential (as in the case of Dr. Hewlett), round out the paper's first five columns.

The remaining column contains a maudlin unsigned poem called "Love's Tricolor," a short item by Artemus Ward (who
would arrive in neighboring Virginia City eight days later), a few items culled from the newspaper exchanges, and some items of homespun jocularity or philosophy. No local news is reported on the front page. The lack of local news on the front and often on the back pages of frontier newspapers would have had a practical value to publishers; by filling the outside pages of the paper (that is, the first and fourth pages) with so-called “timeless” material, editors could have these pages set in type ahead of deadline, making for more efficient use of their printers’ time; in fact, such “news” as appears on the front page of the News for this date could have been set in type by printers at any time, even in free moments while working on other projects, for use in any issue as necessary. It also enabled publishers to halve the number of printers needed to work on the pages at deadline time.

The second page of the News for this date contains a mixture of editorial, commentary, and items clipped from other papers; it also contains national news, telegraphed to the paper from the Sacramento Union, and about two-and-a-half columns of advertising (out of six).

Beginning the first column, which is headed “THE NEWS,” is an item referring the reader to the synopsis of President Lincoln’s State of the Union message of the day before, followed by a five-line report that snow had been falling in the mountains nearby a day earlier. A third item reports the likelihood that U.S. Senator McDougall of California will be
asked by the state Senate to resign because of conduct that "has been a source of extreme mortification to his friends, both personal and political." The two items of commentary illustrate the political inclination of the paper. One takes the Aurora Times to task for not backing the idea of electing a Union man to the position of town marshal; the other attacks the sheriff of Esmeralda County for proclaiming himself a Union man but giving his official printing jobs to the "Copperhead" (i.e., Rebel) Aurora Times. "If that Sheriff’s loyalty has any great depth," the paper remarks, "he has a very poor way of showing it." Another item in the same column summarizes the political instability the editors see in Europe and excuses European nations for taking no great interest in the United States' troubles. Other items in the column are local items used as filler: presentation of a "fine and valuable" watch chain to a departing judge, and the value of the day's shipment out of Virginia City by Wells, Fargo.

A half-column editorial in the second column takes J. Ross Browne to task for what the paper considers his inaccurate portrayal of the region as "a barren mountain side, with two holes punched in it," disregarding the fact that, with nearly four years of rapid development having gone by, this was not the same Gold Hill and Virginia City that Browne had visited. (Cloud notes that items smacking of boosterism often appeared in Western frontier newspapers,
with publishers hoping that Eastern exchanges would clip the items, thereby advancing the cause of settlement (36).)

Another lengthy item quotes a Sacramento Union mining report on the Lake Tahoe region, and the column ends with a pointless, unattributed three-line filler reporting that "A man in Bangor ran against a post, and thinking it shouldn't have been there, sued the city and recovered the sum of $775.16."

The page's third column contains a synopsis of Lincoln's third annual State of the Union speech, an item on the territory's constitutional convention clipped from the Territorial Enterprise, and the following item, which illustrates the extent to which frontier papers were prone to editorialize in their news columns:

**SHOOTING IN CARSON.**—Jo Magee, it is reported in Virginia this morning, was killed last night at Carson City. We have been unable to learn any particulars in regard to the affair, further than that he was fired upon through a window with a double barreled shot gun and instantly killed. This is but another instance in proof of the truth that "those who live by the sword shall die by the sword."

Column four, divided about evenly between news and advertising, contains more national news copied from the Sacramento Union and wired to the paper: a proclamation of
thanksgiving by Lincoln for Union victories and a commentary on national issues that the Union had copied from the New York Tribune. It also contains two exchange items, one from the Marysville, Calif., Express on a highway robbery, the other from the Richmond Whig on the failure of the Confederacy to secure foreign recognition. The fifth column is headed by a list of unclaimed letters at the Gold Hill post office; the rest of the page is filled with advertising similar to that already described.

Page three contains about four-and-a-half columns of advertising, as well as the results of the day’s trading on the Washoe Stock and Exchange Board. But of greatest interest on the page is the first column, filled with the day’s local items. It is here that the character of frontier society comes through most clearly; it is here that the frontier reporter acts as the eyes and ears of the townsperson, observing what is newsworthy (more or less), and occasionally dropping his journalistic diction in favor of a more colloquial, personable approach. In describing a visit to the Yolo Tunnel, a mining site, the local writer remarks that “we found it something more of an undertaking than we had expected.” A few hundred feet from the tunnel’s mouth “sets Mr. John Chinaman in all his ‘sleepy’ glory, engaged in the very useful avocation of turning a wheel blowing air through a pipe or box, to supply the miners with fresh air.” Though
cynical and racist toward the Chinese attendant,\textsuperscript{4} the writer has nothing but kind words for the miners:

\begin{quote}
Much praise is due to men who, in a country like this, will live year after year and delve in such dark, dismal "holes in the ground," never faltering, but pushing forward with determined energy, an energy which no ill success for the time being can check, but which must and will eventually win.
\end{quote}

Two other items in the column also concern the mining business: results of an assay on rock brought in from the "Desert District" by a Mr. Fleming ("these specimens would seem to justify a confidence that that district is to be among the important ones of the Territory"), and a report that the Massillon operation has "struck most excellent rock. . . . The Company feel highly encouraged at the indications."

All three of these items are typical of mining coverage in the local columns of all the papers examined, and they represent concrete examples of Twain's description, only slightly exaggerated, of mining coverage in Roughing It:

\begin{quote}
New claims were taken up daily, and it was the friendly custom to run straight to the newspaper offices, give the reporter forty or fifty "feet," and get them to go and examine the mine and publish a notice of it. They did not care a fig what you
\end{quote}
said about the property so long as you said something. Consequently we generally said a word or two to the effect that the "indications" were good, or that the ledge was "six feet wide," or that the rock "resembled the Comstock" (and so it did--but as a general thing the resemblance was not startling enough to knock you down). If the rock was moderately promising, we followed the custom of the country, used strong adjectives and frothed at the mouth as if a very marvel in silver discoveries had transpired. If the mine was a "developed" one, and had no pay ore to show (and of course it hadn't), we praised the tunnel; said it was one of the most infatuating tunnels in the land; driveled and driveled about the tunnel till we ran entirely out of ecstasies--but never said a word about the rock. We would squander half a column of adulation on a shaft, or a new wire rope, or a dressed pine windlass, or a fascinating force pump, and close with a burst of admiration of the "gentlemanly and efficient Superintendent" of the mine--but never utter a whisper about the rock. (308-9)

The rest of the Daily News's local column consists of items noting the shaky condition of some of Virginia City's sidewalks, the imminent opening of a new theater, the gift of a watch to the deputy county clerk, court records, the paving
of a street, the correction of an erroneous report that a man had been killed by Indians, and the opening of an army recruiting office. Underneath the local column is a list of passengers who have arrived or departed by stagecoach. The fourth and last page of the paper, indicating that the "flush times" were not entirely flush, is filled with advertisements of mining assessments levied and assessments to be sold because of non-payment by their owners; in effect these are notices of stock repossessions.

**Virginia Daily Union**

The *Virginia Daily Union* of December 10, 1863, is, in outline, quite similar to the *Gold Hill Daily News*. Five of its eight front-page columns are filled with advertising similar to that found in the *Daily News*. The sixth column and a few inches of the seventh contain a "LETTER FROM SACRAMENTO. [FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.]" that touches on the subjects of the California Legislature, the weather in Sacramento, the choice of the city as a railroad terminus and the economic effects of the decision, the appearance of the famous (some would say notorious) actress Adah Isaacs Menken (who would appear in Virginia City a few months later), the impossibility of taxing Nevada's mines (an issue that would cause Nevada's first proposed state constitution to be voted down), preparations for a local ball, and musings on the low level of the Sacramento River. The remainder of the page is
filled with items clipped from other newspapers. Of these twelve items, five are from the Reese River Reveille. Three of the Reveille items are mining reports; the other two concern construction of a jail and donation of land for a church. An item from the Chicago Tribune tells of a father murdering his month-old son; a letter from a Confederate soldier’s father to his son is attributed to the New York Sun. Robbery reports are clipped from the Sacramento Union and the Marysville (California) Express. Three unattributed items are a Lincoln anecdote, a report of the retirement and marriage of an actor “well known all over the Pacific coast,” and the arrest of a sailor in San Francisco for a stabbing.

Page two contains a remarkably fulsome, overblown full-column tribute to the late California lawmaker David C. Broderick, whose “toga lies upon a pulseless breast”; two columns of news from the Nevada state constitutional convention, “phonographically reported for the Union by Amos Bowman”; a column and a half of Eastern news clipped from the Sacramento Union; two “special” dispatches to the paper, one containing more Eastern news, the other a report on the war in Mexico; a correspondent’s letter from the Como mining district, discussing mining news and opposing taxation of mines; marriage, birth, and death announcements; various exchange and filler items (e.g., “ACCIDENT--At Shasta on Tuesday, December 1st, a little son of Daniel Lynch, while at
play fell from a fence and broke one of the bones of his right leg just below the knee. He will recover without serious injury to the limb.”); and two columns of advertising.

Page three contains two columns of local items, two columns of exchange items, and four of advertisements (including one for N. Myer’s dry goods store, this time referred to as a “palatial palace of fashion”; inattention by a printer may explain the redundancy). About half the exchange items are war-related, with headings such as “OUR PRISONERS AT RICHMOND,” “REPUDIATING SOUTHERNERS,” and “HOW THE SOLDIER SLEEPS.” A lengthy item headed “A Terrible Picture—Observations of a Visitor to the Hospitals at Annapolis—How Union Men are Treated in Richmond” gives a grisly account of returned prisoners at a Union hospital dying of starvation as a result of their treatment while in Confederate hands. Other items in these columns are of lesser interest.

Apparently the Union’s local reporter had a lot more to say on this date than the reporter for the Daily News; the thirty-five local items take up just a little over two columns, more than twice the space taken up by the News’ eleven items, weighing in a few inches short of one complete column. However, this wealth of items comes at the expense of the personable tone found in the News’ items; the Union reporter comes across as far more serious, rarely intruding
into the copy at all except to deliver an occasional platitude, as in this item:

**DRUNKEN ROW.**—Yesterday morning a difficulty occurred in a saloon on the west side of B street, near Union, which resulted in a drunken customer being knocked down by the proprietor of the establishment, and kicked out into the street. He picked himself up and staggered away covered with bruises and besmeared with blood, and when he gets sober, he will, no doubt, be a wiser if not a better man.

The reporter also draws a lesson from this incident:

**TERRIBLE ACCIDENT AT COMO.**—On last Monday a terrible accident occurred at the Wagram claim, in Como, Palmyra District [sic], which will probably result in the death of a blacksmith, named Oliver Thomas. In the blacksmith shop, connected with the mine, there was a half keg of powder left open and improperly exposed, and it became ignited by a spark which flew into it from a piece of hot iron, which Thomas was forging. A terrific explosion took place, and he was blown to some distance, and seriously if not fatally injured. His face and hands were seriously burned, and his body severely bruised. If he recovers he will be very badly
marked by the powder which was blown into his flesh. This is the third or fourth accident which has occurred in the Palmyra District, from the explosion of gunpowder, and it is singular that men should be so careless as to leave a half keg exposed in a blacksmiths [sic] shop, where, of all places, it ought not to have been.

Some items in the Union's local column are mirrored in the News, possibly because the items came simultaneously to the attention of both reporters, or possibly because the reporter for the News, an afternoon paper, had read them in that morning's Union. Here is one such item from the Union:

**JEROME DAVIS.**—We are glad to learn that the report which was in circulation here a day or two ago, to the effect that Jerome Davis, of Yolo county, California, was killed by Indians on Walker River, is without foundation. A telegraph dispatch has been received from him in Sacramento, stating that he was in that city, and would be over in the Territory in a few days.

From the News:

**The report heretofore circulated that Mr. Jerome Davis, of Yolo county, California, was killed by Indians on Walker river, is incorrect. He is alive and well, and expected to arrive in Virginia in a few days.**
Apparently the reporters for each paper encountered the same sorts of hazards, too. From the Union:

DANGEROUS.—The wooden sidewalk on the east side of D street, leading from Maguire's Opera House to Taylor street, is in such a condition that it is dangerous to walk upon after night. In several places planks are broken out, leaving holes that are regular pitfalls, and in others the railing is broken off, and there is nothing to prevent a person going along in the dark from stepping off and falling a distance of twenty-five or thirty feet. It is remarkable that no accident has yet occurred, as drunken men are passing that way continually. A gentleman, a night or two ago, became bewildered in the dark, and found himself on the very edge of the walk, where one step further would have precipitated him below, injuring him severely, if not killing him on the spot. These dangerous places should be fixed immediately.

The News' reporter put the danger in a slightly different perspective:

INSECURE.—Many of the sidewalks on the Eastern side of the streets of Virginia are very insecurely propped up. In some instances they are for hundreds of feet held up by slender pieces of sawed stuff (which is very weak at the best) twenty and thirty
feet in length. Some excitement will occur one of these days, which will attract an unsuspecting crowd of people upon one of the man-traps, and we shall have a fearful accident to record.

Like the News, the Union also dutifully reports the presentation of a watch to the deputy county clerk (the News placed its value at $365, the Union at $300) and lists arrivals and departures by stage and the value of Wells, Fargo & Co. shipments, matters of which a "newspaper of record" must keep track. Other local items deal with accidents, arguments, the weather, local businesses, and the arrival of shipments of wood and of potatoes ("An immense quantity of potatoes have [sic] arrived in town from California in the last few days. A stranger would suppose that this was was [sic] the chief article of consumption in Virginia city.").

Like the Gold Hill Daily News, the Union’s back page is filled with mining advertisements, an indicator of the towns’ major preoccupation.

Reese River Reveille

The Reese River Reveille, although not a Virginia City paper, is also worth examining as a typical Nevada frontier paper. In fact, it probably represents the frontier more than do the Virginia City and Gold Hill papers. According to Angel, the Reese River district was an extremely remote area that came into prominence in May of 1862 with the discovery
of silver by an express mail rider (303). The city of Austin, where the Reveille was published, was founded the next January, and the first copy of the Reveille was issued May 16, 1863. The paper is one that Mark Twain would have been familiar with; Angel remarks: "The circulation was wide, and the paper was copied extensively" (304). It is not too much to suppose that the Territorial Enterprise may have clipped stories from the Reveille as freely as did the Union; certainly its mining news was of great interest to readers in mining-crazed Virginia City.

Angel's observation that "The town was 'booming,' business was good, and the paper prospered" is borne out by the issue of December 10, 1863. Its entire front page consists of advertising; its entire back page consists of advertising; and two of five columns on page two and four of five columns on page three are advertising. (The Reveille, like many frontier papers, frequently issued supplements. Cloud notes that this was a convenient way to "accommodate what sometimes became an excessive amount of advertising" (57).) Of the space on page two that is devoted to news, the first column consists primarily of mining news; it also includes a letter from a correspondent reporting on development in the "Big Creek country," another area of the Reese River district. Column two is filled with the "latest telegraphic [sic] news from the east": congressional news,
Supreme Court news ("The Supreme Court met to-day. All the Justices were present. No business of importance was transacted."), and war news. About three-fourths of the third column is an item that reflects the harshness of the frontier as well as implicitly acknowledging readers' interest in other people's misfortunes. It is an account of how the county's civil engineer broke his leg while traveling at night in the mountains and crawled to an isolated cabin after having spent the night outside in the bitter cold. Finishing out the column are a small mining-related item, a mention clipped from the Territorial Enterprise of freight traffic bound for Reese River (see note 5), a letter from a correspondent about development in the town of Amador, and this item, a hybrid of news, editorial, and ad: "See advertisement offering the Pioneer Laundry for sale. Good chance for an investment."

The single column of news on page three contains a hodgepodge of local items, including these:

PLEASANT.---Several of the mills in the Canyon were hard at work day before yesterday crushing rock. The music of the crashing stamps is the sweetest that can be heard in a mining camp. Keep it up.

CLERK'S OFFICE.---The County Clerk has fitted up his new office in the Court House quite comfortably. The cracks are stopped up, and the wind whistleth
no more through the walls and floor. A consummation devoutly to be wished.

**SHOULD BE STOPPED.**—The practice of shooting in the streets at all hours of the day and night. We can't see any fun in it, and it is certainly very dangerous. The sides of several buildings have been recently penetrated by these chance shots and we have heard of several narrow escapes.

**CHARIVARI.**—A few nights since a number of the b’hoys were out and treated a newly married couple to one of these musical entertainments. With the aid of tin pans, kettles, pistols, strong lungs &c., they managed to keep up a devil of a noise for some time.

Though the remainder of the items are more mundane and straightforward, the items quoted above, besides illustrating a range of readers’ interests and concerns, exhibit the same kind of liveliness and personality found in the local column of the *Gold Hill Daily News*—and in the extant local items of the *Territorial Enterprise* that are thought to be the work of Dan De Quille and Mark Twain.

The newspapers that have been examined in this chapter flesh out what the history books recount about life in the Nevada mining country. They exhibit the interests of their readers, and the ratio of various types of coverage helps us to gauge readers’ levels of interest in each type of news.
Obviously much on residents' minds were mining news and war news; and local happenings, even the most commonplace, were of interest. In addition, advertising such as that for N. Myer's "perfect palace of fashion" confirms that, despite their being situated in what just a few years before had been rough, sparsely inhabited wasteland, Virginia City and its suburb of Gold Hill were able to offer residents many of the amenities they could find in such better-established places as San Francisco. In turn, the presence of such dry goods stores, as well as grocers, jewelers, music stores, haberdashers and furriers (to cite a few of the ads in the Gold Hill Daily News) indicates that there was a public there creating a demand for their products. It was in this atmosphere, a strange, invigorating mix of harsh climate, violent frontier, and urban aspiration, that Mark Twain produced his first notable work, as local editor for the Territorial Enterprise, which will be examined in the next chapter.
1 Western newspapers continued to refer to mail delivered by express riders as having been carried by Pony Express even after the service properly known by that name was discontinued on October 24, 1861.

2 Cloud (122) mentions an occasion when the Reveille editor’s scissors were washed away in a flood, preventing him from clipping exchange stories; “We cannot conduct the Reveille successfully as a first class family journal without scissors,” she quotes him as saying in the issue of August 20, 1878.

3 The only complete copy of the Territorial Enterprise printed during Mark Twain’s tenure that is extant is the issue of January 10, 1863. Neither the Gold Hill Daily News nor the Reese River Reveille began publication until later that year; the Virginia Daily Union for that date is not extant.

4 The local editor of the Virginia Daily Union writes in the issue of January 21, 1863: “China is a fine country for the Chinese, and California and Washoe for white men. We
think it would be an excellent plan therefore for the former to stay in their own country, and the latter to go where they please” (2).

5 A local item on page three of the Gold Hill Daily News of October 16, 1863, is also evidence that Reese River was doing well: “Virginia is doing heavy business in the provision line with our neighbors of Reese River, as can be seen any day by the teams loading in front of our principal houses for that point.” A similar item appears on page two of the Reveille of December 10, 1863, quoted from the Territorial Enterprise: “There are still a considerable number of teams daily passing through Dayton with freight for Reese River.”
CHAPTER 3

THE VIRGINIA CITY TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE

"The Chief Paper of the Territory"

Frontier journalism in Nevada was a lively business. Myron Angel, in his 1881 History of Nevada, remarks that in the twenty-two years since the founding of the Territorial Enterprise, the state's first newspaper, "Nevada has proved itself to have no equal in the nation as a field of journalistic enterprise" (291). He notes that ninety-one newspapers had been founded in the state during that time, twenty-eight of which [including the Enterprise] were still operating. Jake Highton, in Nevada Newspaper Days: A History of Journalism in the Silver State, points out that competition in Gold Hill and Virginia City was particularly fierce; as of July 4, 1864, six daily papers were operating in the two cities. "But it was the Enterprise that was the most influential newspaper in the West in the 1860s and 1870s" (7). Twain himself, in Roughing It, calls the Enterprise "the chief paper of the Territory" (294), and Richard E. Lingenfelter and Karen Rix Gash, in The Newspapers of Nevada: A History and Bibliography, 1854-1979, call the Enterprise
Nevada's first, and for many years its most influential, newspaper. Almost every prominent Nevada journalist served on its staff at some time during his career, and much color was added to its pages by the emerging talents of young Samuel Clemens, the steady William Wright (Dan De Quille), a member of its staff for nearly thirty years, and the erratic James W.E. "Lying Jim" Townsend. (253)

Although the Enterprise was chronologically first among Nevada newspapers, Highton does note a caveat: the Enterprise was the first printed Nevada newspaper. Two handwritten weekly newspapers apparently preceded it: the Gold-Cañon Switch of Johntown, in 1854, and the Scorpion of Genoa, in 1857 (2).

History of the Territorial Enterprise

According to Angel (317) and Lingenfelter and Gash (253), the Enterprise was founded December 18, 1858, in the town of Genoa, by W.L. Jernigan and Alfred James. James sold his interest in August 1859 to Jonathan Williams. The paper was produced in Genoa until November 5, 1859; on the tenth the paper moved to Carson City and went back into publication on the twelfth. In May 1860, Williams bought out Jernigan, and in October he moved the plant to Virginia City, where the paper resumed publication as a weekly on November 3. On March 2, 1861, Joseph T. Goodman and Denis E. McCarthy bought interests in the paper.
On September 24, 1861, the paper became a daily. Dennis Driscoll bought Williams' share in the paper early in 1862, but on October 28, 1863, Driscoll sold out to Goodman and McCarthy. After the period during which Samuel Clemens worked for the Enterprise, further ownership changes ensued as the fortunes of the Comstock wavered and eventually declined. The paper finally failed on January 16, 1893, was revived again between 1894 and May 30, 1916, yet again for a few issues in 1946, again in a highly stylized form as a "weekly of western frontier tradition" by Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg beginning in 1952 for about ten years (Highton 15-18). The Territorial Enterprise was resurrected once again as a tourist paper in 1985 but was closed in July of 1987. The Hong Kong company that owned the paper appropriated the name Territorial Enterprise for use in its greeting card business (Reno Gazette-Journal, July 24, 1987, 10B). A spiritual successor to the Enterprise, the feisty Comstock Chronicle, began operating shortly afterward (Reno Gazette-Journal, September 7, 1989, 5B) and is still in publication, sprinkling pointed commentary or humorous asides among its news items.

"Flush Times" and Before

Twain, speaking of Virginia City's "flush times," gives this description of the Enterprise of the 1860's:

Mr. Goodman and another journeyman printer had borrowed forty dollars and set out from San
Francisco to try their fortunes in the new city of Virginia. They found the Territorial Enterprise, a poverty-stricken weekly journal, gasping for breath and likely to die. They bought it, type, fixtures, good will and all, for a thousand dollars, on long time. The editorial sanctum, newsroom, pressroom, publication office, bedchamber, parlor, and kitchen were all compressed into one apartment and it was a small one, too. The editors and printers slept on the floor, a Chinaman did their cooking, and the "imposing-stone" was the general dinner table. But now things were changed. The paper was a great daily, printed by steam; there were five editors and twenty-three compositors; the subscription price was sixteen dollars a year; the advertising rates were exorbitant, and the columns crowded. The paper was clearing from six to ten thousand dollars a month, and the "Enterprise Building" was finished and ready for occupation—a stately fireproof brick. Every day from five all the way up to eleven columns of "live" advertisements were left out or crowded into spasmodic and irregular "supplements" (Roughing It 313).

Dan De Quille (pen name of William Wright), one of Twain's colleagues on the Enterprise, adds more detail to the picture:
The office was at the corner of A Street and Sutton Avenue, then near the business center of the town; B Street being the principal business street. The building occupied as the office of publication was a one-story, rickety frame structure, about thirty-five feet long and twenty feet in width.

In this room was the press (one of the old-fashioned Washington presses), the cases of the compositors, the desk of the book-keeper, the tables of the editors, and all the belongings of the office. On the north side of the main building was a shed addition which was both kitchen and dining-room, and besides was fitted up as a sleeping place for all hands. Along the sides of the walls "bunks" were arranged one above another, as on shipboard, and as in the cabins of the miners of California in the early days.

The office did very well in summer, but in winter it was as full of discomforts as any place seen by Dante during his journey through the infernal regions. There were not only extremes of heat and cold, but one often suffered from both at the same moment—would be freezing on one side and burning on the other. On very cold nights the stove would be made red hot. Around it the editors drew up their tables, and the printers moved their cases as
near as they could get them. They stood at their cases with old barley sacks lashed around their feet with pieces of baling rope, and were frequently obliged to go to the stove and thaw out their half-frozen fingers. . . .

In 1862 the Enterprise office was moved to a large brick building on North C Street, where everything was about as comfortable as in the majority of country towns on the Pacific Coast. (Angel 319-20)

Office Behavior

The Territorial Enterprise office was not known for its decorum; in fact, Henry Nash Smith says in Mark Twain of the Enterprise, the atmosphere "seems to have been like that of a fraternity house without a housemother" (5). The reporters were in their 20s, and editor in chief Joe Goodman was 24 in the year Twain joined the paper. Smith, describing the setting as "a kind of bachelors' paradise," lists the pleasures of the job as including billiards, cigars, theater passes, gifts of stakes in mines, and abundant alcohol.

During its glory days in the 1860s, the Enterprise matched in rambunctiousness the society in which it existed—in George Lyman’s words, it was "the mirror of Washoe's audacious life" (The Saga of the Comstock Lode 126). As Angel puts it,

The spirit of the Nevada press has always been of an exaggerated character, such as developed a "Mark
Twain" and "The Unreliable"; aggressive to an extreme that not unfrequently resulted in a duel. . . . What in other places would have been considered thrilling; what in California even, would have been deemed sufficiently uncommon, or novel, to excite mirth, would have passed unnoticed in the Sagebrush State at that time, as too tame, too insipid, in comparison with the exaggerated mental condition and feverish pulse of the masses, to receive attention. The press, to attract notice from that people, must partake of the largeness of the reader. Because of this the reporters were an exaggerated aggregation that partook of and were an outgrowth of those excited times. Nothing in the ordinary would do. It was necessary to furnish literary food conditioned to digest by an inflated public mind, abnormally developed. (292)

One such morsel involved the steam press that Twain refers to in his description of the Enterprise. By Angel’s account, the Enterprise’s steam press was the first one used to print a newspaper in Nevada, on July 31, 1863.

The general mix-up on that occasion of new press, newspaper and bottles of wine, caused “Mark Twain” to take among other things, a severe cold, “that settled on his mind,” and he was forced for a couple of days to turn over to his friend Clement
T. Rice, "The Unreliable," [Roughing It's Boggs]
the local department of the paper. The next issue
of the Enterprise was a sensation. The readers of
that paper were astounded, nonplussed, befogged.
They read the following, and supposed of course it
was from repentant Twain; but what could have
caused it? was this unmitigated wag drunk again, or
had he become sober, gone crazy, or what?:—

August 1, 1863.

APOLOGETIC.—It is said, "an open confession is
good for the soul." We have been on the stool of
repentance for a long time, but have not before had
the moral courage to acknowledge our manifold sins
and wickedness. We confess to this weakness. We
have commenced this article under the head of
'Apologetic'--we mean it, if we ever meant anything
in our life. To Mayor Arick, Hon. Wm. M. Stewart,
Marshal Perry, Hon. J. B. Winters, Mr. Olin, and
Samuel Witherel, besides a host of others whom we
have ridiculed from behind the shelter of our
reportorial position, we say to these gentlemen, we
acknowledge our faults, and in all weakness and
simplicity--upon our bended marrow-bones--we ask
their forgiveness, promising that in future we will
give them no cause for anything but the best of
feeling toward us. To "Young Wilson," and the
"Unreliable", (as we have wickedly termed them), we feel that no apology we can make begins to atone for the many insults we have given them. Towards these gentlemen we have been as mean as a man could be—and we have always prided ourself on this base quality. We feel that we are the least of all humanity, as it were. We will now go in sackcloth and ashes for the next forty days. What more can we do? The latter-named gentleman has saved us several times from receiving a sound threshing for our impudence and assurance. He has sheltered and clothed us. We have had a hankering, "my boy," to redeem our character—or what little we have. Tomorrow we may get in the same old way again. If we do, we want it now understood that this confession stands. Gentleman [sic] do you accept our good intentions?

Mark Twain was thunder-struck on picking up the paper, and reading this apology. It proved a galvanic and sovereign remedy for his cold, however, and the next day found him on duty again, when he took occasion to explain in the following characteristic strain:--

* * * We are to blame for giving "the Unreliable" an opportunity to misrepresent us, and therefore refrain from repining to any great extent at the
result. We simply claim the right to deny the truth of every statement made by him in yesterday's paper, to annul all apologies he coined as coming from us, and to hold him up to public commiseration as a reptile endowed with no more intellect, no more cultivation, no more Christian principle than animates and adorns the sportive jackass rabbit of the Sierras. We have done. (292-93)

Uninhibited Coverage

The playful, almost reckless attitude toward journalism exhibited by this incident was not an isolated occurrence. Not only did such practical jokes take place, but news reports could not always be trusted to be based on fact. As Smith puts it, "Nevada journalism of the 1860's was nonchalant and uninhibited, and a report of the most commonplace event was likely to veer into fantasy or humorous diatribe" (7). The Enterprise was typical of this attitude, critics agree. Edgar Marquess Branch, in his introduction to Early Tales & Sketches, Volume 1, describes the paper as having a "youthful and often irreverent nature, largely because of Goodman's influence" (16). Arthur McEwen, in a January 22, 1893, article in the San Francisco Examiner, called the paper's attitude an "indifference to news" (Sketches 20). It might be more accurate, however, to say that the Enterprise exercised a loose interpretation of what constituted news. "Either Mark or Dan would dismiss a murder
with a couple of inches, and sit down and fill up a column with a fancy sketch," McEwen is quoted (anonymously) in John Lauber’s *The Making of Mark Twain* as saying (111). Branch quotes as an example of the paper’s cavalier attitude the following short item from October 1, 1862, reprinted in the Oroville, California, *Butte Record* of October 11, on page 2:

A GALE.—About 7 o’clock Tuesday evening (Sept. 30th) a sudden blast of wind picked up a shooting gallery, two lodging houses and a drug store from their tall wooden stilts and set them down again some ten or twelve feet back of their original location, with such a degree of roughness as to jostle their insides into a sort of chaos. There were many guests in the lodging houses at the time of the accident, but it is pleasant to reflect that they seized their carpet sacks and vacated the premises with an alacrity suited to the occasion.

*Sketches 20*

Although it cannot be identified for certain, the item, in Branch’s judgment, bears the stamp of Mark Twain. In any case, it is an example of the style of journalism the *Territorial Enterprise* practiced: factual but breezy, and containing a touch of commentary that would be absent were the same item to be reported today by, say, the Associated Press.

However, the *Territorial Enterprise* did not secure its reputation as the state’s pre-eminent newspaper by throwing
responsibility entirely to the winds. The paper did, for instance, cover territorial and state legislative proceedings extensively, as well as the territory’s two constitutional conventions, and it was under contract to publish the laws of the second session of the territorial legislature (1862), a contract that Branch says Sam Clemens, who had covered the session and who happened also to be the brother of the secretary of the territory, was “almost certainly instrumental in securing” (18).

**Examination of the Territorial Enterprise**

Examination of the Territorial Enterprise for January 10, 1863, the only copy of the paper from Mark Twain’s tenure on it that is known to exist, gives a clearer picture of what it presented to readers than examination of isolated articles can give.

Like its competitors, and like most frontier newspapers, the Enterprise places advertisements prominently on its front page. Four of its seven columns are advertisements; two contain laws passed by the 1862 session of the territorial legislature (the laws are “PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY”); and the far left column is filled with an editorial praising wealthy Nevada resident Theodore Winters for his efforts to pass a bill in the legislature and defending him from the San Francisco Bulletin’s accusations of having bought passage of the legislation. The placement of the editorial is notable;
the Enterprise's competitors generally began their front-page advertisements on the left side of the page and placed editorial copy on the right side. One can only speculate what purpose the Enterprise sought to achieve by arranging its page this way. It should also be noted that although the laws might appear to be editorial copy, the space in which they appeared was paid for by state contract, and the columns in which they appear bear the same type headings as do other advertising columns in the paper.

The ads in the second, third, and fourth columns of the page are what today would be called display advertising; i.e., large ads designed to attract the eye, using such effects as short, centered lines; large amounts of space between lines; stumptstep lines; an occasional icon showing, for instance, a hat or a chair; and, within narrow limits, varying type fonts and sizes. A sampling of these ads shows that Virginia Citians could avail themselves of McCluskey’s Pioneer Quadrille Band for performances at “BALLS AND PRIVATE PARTIES on the most reasonable terms,” as well as a brass band available for “Celebrations, Parades, Theatres, Funerals, etc.”; lessons from the dancing school at La Platte Hall, 15 South B Street; groceries, liquor, crockery, clothing, boots, and shoes, as well as dry goods, carpeting, oil cloths, and wallpaper, from Block and Co. (formerly Hirschman, Ottenheimer & Co.); and fine Havana cigars, tobacco, Meerschaum pipes, stationery, candy, cutlery, and fancy goods
from A. Philippson's store at the corner of C and Union Streets. Other ads on the page promote clothing, furniture, grocery, hat, liquor, and jewelry stores. S.H. Maklette offers his services as a surveyor and civil engineer, and the Central Pacific Railroad gives notice of a stock offering.

The far right-hand column is nearly filled with "professional cards," as its heading calls them: short ads, usually of three lines, overwhelmingly for attorneys but also for notaries, doctors, a midwife, a county clerk, and the county sheriff, advising the public of the advertiser's willingness to do business.

Page two begins with a strongly worded endorsement of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which had been issued January 1. The writer of the editorial says, in part:

Since the day when men first sought protection in the mild decrees of patriarchal power beside the Euphrates, no mandate from the throne of despotism, from the sceptre of constitutional authority, from the seat of human justice, has exceeded or even equaled in importance the freedom proclamation of Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America. There is a thunder in it which shakes the very earth we tread, which reverberates through the ruined temples of the past, and rolls back in deafening echoes from the shores of the distant future. No word has ever before spoken liberty to
four million of human beings so completely manacled in soul and body, and to the end of time no earthly edict will ever again give freedom to so great a host.

The rest of the four columns containing news copy (out of seven columns on the page) are a hodgepodge of material: wire reports from the East, an assortment of brief local and exchange items, wire news from San Francisco, a letter from a Reese River correspondent, a list of passengers who arrived on the previous day's stagecoaches, and the local stock report. The headline on the Eastern news gives a good idea of its contents: "Immense Issue of Treasury Notes to be Made—Gold at 30 per cent. Premium--The Rebels say we have withdrawn from before Vicksburg--The Governor of Kentucky rejects Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation." The exchange items include rumors that "Secretary Chase is occupied with matrimonial as well as financial schemes," an item from the Marysville Appeal in which a correspondent in Acapulco anticipates an attack there by the French, and the following:

**FUNNY DOGS.**--The reporter of the Stockton Independent was recently attracted to a crowd who were watching a dog fight. After tearing each other for a few minutes, the canines paused to breathe, when one of them distinctly said to the other: "I'll bet you six bits that I can whip you in two rounds." All eyes were bent on the dogs with the
utmost astonishment except those of the reporter, who quietly turned round and saw the Fakir of Siva standing behind him, which fully explained the mystery.

Among the local items are notices that "owing to the indisposition of Rev. Mr. Rising [model of the confused clergyman in Roughing It's Buck Fanshaw episode], the services usually held by him at Virginia and Gold Hill, will, on Sunday, be omitted"; that "Baxter and Durant have laid on our table the latest Eastern newspapers and illustrateds"; and that "a large quantity of provisions remained untouched after the Sanitary ball and supper on Thursday night. The ladies designed giving these to the poor of the city, but up to yesterday afternoon they had been rather unsuccessful in finding subjects for their charity." And there is this cryptic item, quoted here in full: "TOM ANDREWS LIBERATED.—We learned last evening that Tom Andrews had been discharged from custody and had arrived at Dayton." This item is interesting not only in regard to the information it doesn't give—Who is Tom Andrews? Why was he in custody? Where? For how long? Why was he released?—but for its violation of one of Enterprise editor Joe Goodman's supposed guiding principles. In Roughing It, Twain quotes Goodman as telling him:

"Never say 'We learn' so-and-so, or 'It is reported,' or 'It is rumored,' or 'We understand'
so-and-so, but go to headquarters and get the absolute facts, and then speak out and say 'It is so-and-so.' Otherwise, people will not put confidence in your news. Unassailable certainty is the thing that gives a newspaper the firmest and most valuable reputation." (296)

The letter from the Reese River correspondent on this page is undistinguished; according to the letter, its writer became acquainted with Enterprise reporter Dan De Quille, who encouraged him to relate his experiences. The San Francisco wire news offers more immediate interest, mainly because of its deadpan treatment of some rather sensational news—a treatment the Enterprise probably would not have given the items if it had written them itself:

The clipper ship F.W. Bally, 711 tons, which sailed yesterday for Puget Sound, drifted ashore four miles south of Point Lobos, last evening, and was lost. Capt. Dyer and seven men were lost, and nine were saved.

Allen Cook blew his brains out at the What Cheer House, last night. He leaves a wife and children in Niles, Michigan. The cause was evidently despair on account of bad luck in the mines.²

The Pacific Mail Steamship Company have voted to pay half salary until January 1st, 1864, to the
widows and orphans left by the lost crew of the Golden Gate.

Dennis W. Barry dropped dead at Benchly & Co.'s yesterday; disease, apoplexy.

The dispatch also includes a San Francisco stock report. Given separately are the local "stock remarks," which are of particular interest because they provide an example for comparison with a local item headed "Our Stock Remarks," probably written by Sam Clemens, that had appeared about 10 days earlier (Sketches 175-76). The January 10 stock report is quite straightforward in its approach. It says, in part:

The Yellow Jacket, we are informed, have commenced out against the Union, Laboring, and Princess companies, to quiet title. Considerable stock in the Humboldt and Esmeralda is being daily offered in this market, without sales. The want of purchasers for these stocks is probably more attributable to the indefinite knowledge of the claims and vague showing of them, than the lack of confidence in the claims. The latter difficulty can be obviated by incorporating.

The item attributed to Clemens takes a far different tone:

Owing to the fact that our stock reporter attended a wedding last evening, our report of transactions in that branch of robbery and speculation is not
quite as complete and satisfactory as usual this morning. About eleven o’clock last night the aforesaid remarker pulled himself up stairs by the banisters, and stumbling over the stove, deposited the following notes on our table, with the remark: “S(hic)am, just ’laberate this, w(hic)ill, yer?” We said we would, but we couldn’t. If any of our readers think they can, we shall be pleased to see the translation. Here are the notes: “Stocks brisk, and Ophir has taken this woman for your wedded wife. Some few transactions have occurred in rings and lace veils, and at figures tall, graceful and charming. There was some inquiry late in the day for parties who would take them for better or for worse, but there were few offers. There seems to be some depression in this stock. We mentioned yesterday that our Father which art in heaven. Quotations of lost reference, and now I lay me down to sleep,” &c., &c., &c.

One conclusion, at least, may be drawn from the items just quoted: that the Enterprise, while aware of its responsibility to report the news, was not averse to poking a little fun at itself and its reporters, and acknowledging the dichotomy between its responsibility and the occasional irresponsibility of those who produced it. The Enterprise may in fact have gained a certain amount of devotion from its
readers for, in effect, admitting its fallibility. On the other hand, readers who depended on the newspaper to provide prompt, accurate business information would have been frustrated by the item and probably would have been forced to buy an issue of the competing Virginia Daily Union to find out what they needed to know.

The three right-hand columns of page two consist of advertising much resembling that on the first page. Most notable are an entire column of advertising paid for by Kelly, Mott & Co., dealers in hardware, iron, stoves, and brass goods, and a half column bought by Morill’s Drug Store. The Kelly, Mott ad touts, among other products, “STOVES, STOVES, STOVES!” and “TINWARE, TINWARE!” Morill’s ad lists what appears like a succession of sixteen local items (although they could not be mistaken for news copy), each beginning "If you want," then listing an array of items for sale, and ending “go to MORRILL’S.” Among other advertisers on the page are a grocery, a lumber yard, stock brokers, and a barber shop.

Mark Twain’s Local Column

Page three contains six columns of advertising out of seven (the fourth page, as in the case of the other papers examined, is completely advertising), but the page is most notable for its one column of local items, which, though like all such columns in Western newspapers are unsigned, scholars attribute to Mark Twain. About two-thirds of the column is a
report on the Sanitary Ball, given the previous Thursday (January 10, the date of the paper, was a Saturday) by the local chapter of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, an organization that during the Civil War helped care for sick and wounded Union soldiers. (A controversy in which the Sanitary Commission played a part would eventually result in Mark Twain's abrupt and unceremonious departure from Virginia City.) This item illustrates both Mark Twain's gift for storytelling and the Territorial Enterprise's willingness to let him exercise it. In imagination and in its conversational tone, the item outdoes those that appeared in competing papers' local columns, as can be seen by comparing it with the extracts quoted in Chapter 2. The items from the Virginia Daily Union are stodgy and preachy at best; those from the Gold Hill Daily News and the Reese River Reveille show more imagination and personality, but they are still marked by a stilted formality of language that seems more forbidding than friendly, more condescending than confidential. The Sanitary Ball item is too lengthy to be quoted in full, but this excerpt is typical of its tone:

We had just finished executing one of those inscrutable figures of the plain quadrille; we were feeling unusually comfortable, because we had gone through the performance as well as anybody could have done it, except that we had wandered a little toward the last; in fact we had wandered out of our
own and into somebody else's set—but that was a matter of small consequence, as the new locality was as good as the old one, and we were used to that sort of thing anyhow. We were feeling comfortable, and we had assumed an attitude—we have a sort of talent for posturing—a pensive attitude, copied from the Colossus of Rhodes—when the ladies were ordered to the centre. Two of them got there, and the other two moved off gallantly, but they failed to make the connection. They suddenly broached to under full headway, and there was a sound of parting canvas. Their dresses were anchored under our boots, you know. It was unfortunate, but it could not be helped.

The last of the local column's four items also concerns the ball and takes much the same tone as the first item.

THE MUSIC.—Millington and McCluskey's Band furnished the music for the Sanitary Ball on Thursday night, and also for the Odd Fellows' Ball the other evening in Gold Hill, and the excellence of the article was only equalled by the industry and perseverance of the performers. We consider that the man who can fiddle all through one of those Virginia Reels without losing his grip, may be depended upon in any kind of musical emergency.
Another item in the column, the second, also shows a touch of whimsy. It notes that the County Commission has leased a building on B Street to house courtrooms and offices.

The first floor, we believe [another violation of Goodman’s certainty principle], is to be used for a United States District Court room, and the second story will be partitioned into offices and a Probate Court room. It would probably have been better to have reversed this order of things, on account of the superior light and the freedom from dust and noise afforded by the upper story; yet it is possible that these advantages may be as necessary in one case as the other—we do not care about dictating much in the matter so long as no one will be likely to pay us for it.

Despite Twain’s avowed indifference, he goes on to detail how he would set up the floor space were he designing the interior.

The third item in the column, and the only one remaining to be discussed, contains only the slightest hint of news: that a turkey of unknown ownership has been running loose behind the newspaper’s office. Otherwise, it seems to be a case of Twain enjoying himself; it is also an early illustration of his observance of the weakness of human
nature, in this instance with himself as the object of study. The item reads:

**DUE NOTICE.**—Moralists and philosophers have adjudged those who throw temptation in the way of the erring, equally guilty with those who are thereby led into evil; and we therefore hold the man who suffers that turkey to run at large just back of our office as culpable as ourself, if some day that fowl is no longer perceptible to human vision. The Czar of Russia never cast his eye on the minarets of Byzantium half as longingly as we gaze on that old gobbler. Turkey stuffed with oysters is our weakness—our mouth waters at the recollection of sundry repasts of that character—and this bird aforementioned appears to us to have an astonishing capacity for oyster-stuffing. Wonder if those fresh oysters at Allmack’s are all gone? We grow ravenous—pangs of hunger gnaw our vitals—if to-morrow’s setting sun gleams on the living form of that turkey, we yield our reputation for strategy.

Scholars have not discovered how this struggle of conscience was resolved.

**Judging the Enterprise**

All in all, the January 10, 1863, issue of *The Daily Territorial Enterprise* gives a good indication of why the
paper proved to be so popular. Its news coverage is solid and is comparable to that of competing newspapers; its editorial position is strong and boldly stated; and its local column, as written by Twain, makes up in entertainment value what it lacks in substance. The willingness of editor Goodman to afford his local writers, particularly Twain and Dan De Quille, such latitude distinguishes the Enterprise from its competition. Although the local writer of the Gold Hill Daily News, for instance, felt free to let some amount of personality show through his writing, his columns pale beside those of the Enterprise. The freedom of the atmosphere at the Enterprise could occasionally backfire, however, sometimes with serious consequences, as will be seen in Chapter 5. Before that possibility is explored, though, it will be helpful to examine the Enterprise’s two best-known writers—Twain and De Quille—at work.
NOTES

1 An item from the front page of the August 19, 1994, issue tells of an offer by the prostitutes of the Mustang Ranch to sponsor a fund to "adopt" wild stallions. The editor comments: "[Because they see so few in the course of their work? Editor]." The headline of the story refers to the women as "Working Girls."

2 Eight months after the appearance of this item, Mark Twain would concoct for his "Bloody Massacre" hoax an oddly similar, though far more gruesome, story of a man who went to extreme lengths because of financial problems (see Chapter 5).

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CHAPTER 4

MARK TWAIN AND DAN DE QUILLE AT WORK

Sam Clemens’s Experience in Journalism

Although the Enterprise job was his first reporting experience, Sam Clemens did not arrive at the paper entirely a stranger to the trade of journalism. As Edgar M. Branch recounts, he had been published in newspapers as far back as the 1850s, including two pieces of satire in his brother Orion’s Hannibal Journal in 1852 (Early Tales & Sketches, Volume 1 6-7). These pieces, aimed at the editor of a competing paper, caused a stir that he little expected, graphically demonstrating to the young Clemens the power of the press—at least its power to arouse the ire of those who are able to reply in a rival publication. The episode foreshadowed at least two occurrences at the Territorial Enterprise: In writing the “Petrified Man” hoax, Twain would again use the news columns of a paper to poke fun at someone with whom he was at odds, and in the wake of the Sanitary Fund flour sack auction, he would again instigate a feud, with far more serious consequences than in the earlier instance (see Chapter 5).

The opportunity for this early journalistic misstep was provided when Orion Clemens allowed his younger brother to
take over his duties as editor of the Hannibal Journal while he was away in Tennessee (72). Orion had apparently written an item during August complaining about the barking of stray dogs, signing it "A Dog-bedeviled Citizen." The local writer, or "local," of the rival Tri-Weekly Messenger, J.T. Hinton, had answered sarcastically in defense of dogs, and Orion had let the issue drop. Sam, however, did not. While Orion was away, Sam published a satirical drawing, headed "`Local' Resolves to Commit Suicide," poking fun at what Clemens later recalled as an attempt by Hinton to drown himself after being jilted. The drawing, published September 16, 1852, depicts Hinton with the head of a dog, wading into a stream. The text accompanying it reads:

"LOCAL," disconsolate from receiving no further notice from "A DOG-BE-DEVILED CITIZEN," contemplates Suicide. His "pocket-pistol" (i.e., the bottle,) failing in the patriotic work of ridding the country of a nuisance, he resolves to "extinguish his chunk" by feeding his carcass to the fishes of Bear Creek, while friend and foe are wrapt in sleep. Fearing, however, that he may get out of his depth, he sounds the stream with his walking-stick.

The artist has, as you will perceive, Mr. Editor, caught the gentleman's countenance as correctly as the thing could have been done with the real dog-
guerytype apparatus. Ain't he pretty? and don't he step along through the mud with an air? "Peace to his re-mains."

"A DOG-BE-DEVILED CITIZEN."

Hinton's response was quick and acerbic. He threatened at first to reply in kind, but soon thought better of the idea, declaring: "Such controversies are adapted only to those whose ideas are of so obscene and despicable an order as to forever bar them against a gentlemanly or even decent discussion . . ." (Sketches 73).

Evidently stung by such language, Sam Clemens published two more drawings a week after his first installment, again of the dog-visaged "local," also accompanied by written explanations of the drawings (76-77). Neither is at all subtle, and neither has the biting cleverness of the previous week's installment. Clemens closes the attack by writing:

MR. EDITOR:

I have now dropped this farce, and all attempts to again call me forth will be useless.

A DOG-BE-DEVILED CITIZEN.

Not only does the situation foreshadow the sadly farcical sequence of events that would drive him out of Virginia City, but these very words of Clemens's would be echoed in an exchange of letters with J.L. Laird, publisher of the Virginia Daily Union, that was a part of those events. Replying to Clemens's attempt to provoke him into a duel,
Laird writes that “you must excuse me from receiving any more long epistles from you,” i.e., that any more attempts to call him forth will be useless. Introspective as Twain was, he seems never to have recognized that curbing the tendencies he exhibited in the earlier incident could have saved him the embarrassment of the latter.

Twain admitted in 1871 that he had given no thought at the time to the “moral obliquity” of satirizing other people (Sketches 7); nor, apparently, would he do so at the Enterprise, at least in the writing of his “Petrified Man” and “Bloody Massacre” hoaxes, both of which use the names of actual people for humorous purposes they most likely would not have approved of.

Subsequent to his adventures as a local satirist, Clemens had also published other items in the Hannibal Journal, travel letters in his brother Orion’s Muscatine, Iowa, Journal and, in 1856, the “Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass Letters” in the Keokuk, Iowa, Post (Sketches 9). In 1859, he published in the New Orleans Crescent a satire on the newspaper contributions of Isaiah Sellers, a Mississippi River pilot (Sketches 126-28); in 1860, he published another river satire in the St. Louis Missouri Republican (Sketches 142). But this experience apparently was not a factor in his hiring at the Enterprise. As Paul Fatout relates in Mark Twain in Virginia City, what landed him the job were the facetious letters, signed “Josh,” that he had written to the
paper beginning in spring 1862 (6-7); unfortunately for scholars, none of these letters are known to have survived, although the subjects of two of them are known. One was a satire of an egotistical oration given possibly either by (as Twain remembered it) Nevada Chief Justice George Turner or by the politician L.O. Sterns (Sketches 17). The other, according to Albert Bigelow Paine in Mark Twain: A Biography, was a burlesque of a Fourth of July speech that began, "I was sired by the Great American Eagle and foaled by a continental dam" (203).

Clemens's Arrival at the Territorial Enterprise

At the time he wrote the "Josh" letters, Clemens was still prospecting for gold and silver in the Esmeralda mining district, with little success. His money was about to give out; he wrote to his brother Orion: "My debts are far greater than I thought for . . . I owe about $45 or $50, and have got about $45 in my pocket. But how in the h—l I am going to live on something over $100 until October or November, is singular. The fact is, I must have something to do, and that shortly, too" (Paine 202). In the same letter he mentioned the possibility of corresponding for the Sacramento Union or the Carson City Silver Age. According to Branch, Clemens actually did apply to the Union, through Orion, but had not received a reply before July 30, 1862, by which time he had an offer of $25 a week from the Enterprise to become its local editor (Sketches 15). On August 7, he wrote to Orion
that he had accepted the Enterprise offer; apparently he had still not received a reply from the Union. Paine presents Clemens's decision on whether to take the Enterprise job in almost biblical terms:

As a matter of fact, he fasted and prayed a good while over the "call." . . . So he had gone into the wilderness to fight out his battle alone. . . . how could he know, to paraphrase the old form of Christian comfort, that his end as a miner would mean, in another sphere, "a brighter resurrection" than even his rainbow imagination could paint?

(203-204)

But scholars are skeptical that such a sojourn actually took place. For one thing, they note (as does Paine) that Clemens wrote to his sister, Pamela, from the same location where a week earlier he had claimed to Orion that he was about to make a walking trip of "60 or 70 miles through a totally uninhabited country." Paul Fatout, in Mark Twain in Virginia City, comments:

For a physically lazy man like Sam Clemens, a walk of some 140 miles in seven days--loaded down with enough food and trappings to survive in uninhabited country--seems far out of character. . . . The hope of riches died painfully, no doubt, as it did many times during his life, but if he fought any battle
with himself he surely did not tramp all that
distance to start hostilities. (7)

Branch notes three reasons that the editors of the
Enterprise were interested in hiring Clemens:
they had been pleased with his volunteer "Josh"
letters, which demonstrated his superior humorous
talents; they would soon need someone to replace
their local editor, Dan De Quille (William Wright),
who was planning a trip back East; and finally they
knew that Clemens had been the gregarious "clerk"
who served his brother, Secretary Clemens, in the
first session of the legislature—a fact that might
make him a good political reporter and would almost
certainly make him a political influence. (Sketches
16)

So it was that a scraggly Samuel L. Clemens reported for
duty in Virginia City late in September of 1862, "corroded by
the wear and tear of rugged months in Esmeralda" (Fatout 7-8). Twain claims in Roughing It that
I was a rusty-looking city editor, I am free to
confess—coatless, slouch hat, blue woolen shirt,
pantaloons stuffed into boot-tops, whiskered half
down to the waist, and the universal navy revolver
slung to my belt. But I secured a more Christian
costume and discarded the revolver. (295)
Sam Clemens and Mark Twain

Because most of the Enterprise files have been lost, it is impossible to say exactly when Clemens’ first work after his hiring appeared in the paper. Even if the files were intact, the task would not be easy; it was not the custom at frontier papers for local editors to sign their columns, and correspondents generally used pseudonyms, a fact to which we can credit the eventual invention of the name Mark Twain. Clemens’s Enterprise colleague William Wright was far better known as Dan De Quille, and his friend and competitor Clement T. Rice of the Virginia Daily Union (who appeared in Mark Twain’s correspondence as “the Unreliable”) signed his correspondence Carl (Henry Nash Smith, Mark Twain of the Enterprise 211).

The first extant material that scholars suspect that Clemens wrote appeared October 1, 1862. It consists of items from the Enterprise’s local column of that issue: “A Gale,” quoted in Chapter 3; and “The Indian Troubles on the Overland Route” and “[More Indian Troubles],” which, according to Branch and Hirst (Sketches 389), apparently are the items Twain referred to in Roughing It when telling how he elaborated on the facts after he “discovered some emigrant wagons going into camp on the plaza and found that they had lately come through the hostile Indian country and had fared rather roughly” (Roughing It 297). The first he is known to have
written, the "Petrified Man" hoax, appeared October 4 (Sketches 15).

Certainly the most important milestone in Clemens's career at the Territorial Enterprise occurred on February 3, 1863. On this date the paper published the first letter that Clemens signed Mark Twain. Although he had been at the paper only since September and had been working alone as local editor for only a month, editor Joe Goodman had let Clemens take a week to visit Carson City, although perhaps under the proviso that he submit correspondence while he was there. This he did, writing three letters that week as Mark Twain. As Branch and Hirst point out, and as is evident in newspapers of the period, "the newspaper letter from distant points was a standard, often a rather personal, way of reporting the news" (Sketches 192). Clemens had, after all, won his job by means of his Josh letters, and with his Mark Twain correspondence he came into his own. Branch and Hirst comment,

Clemens learned to use the form more inventively than most other reporters did. At his best, he could float bits of hard news in a strong current of personal narrative and imaginative comedy, and he soon achieved an appealing informality and a flexible medium which commanded a large audience. (Sketches 192)
Although much of Clemens's work at the Enterprise was not signed "Mark Twain" (for instance, his local columns and his political reporting), the Twain persona quickly attached itself to Clemens; when he is referred to in his own newspaper or in others, it is invariably as Mark Twain (except in the case of his serious political coverage). In his introduction to Sketches, Branch summarizes the importance of the Mark Twain figure:

One aspect of Clemens' development in this two-year period in Nevada deserves special notice: the emergence of Mark Twain as a public figure whose way of reporting the news, whose peculiar expressions ("so to speak," "they shoved," "infernal humbug," "from hell to breakfast"), and whose very comings and goings were themselves news. Because from the beginning of his Nevada journalism Clemens wrote about himself, and because his talents as a writer and as a public speaker--what Paine called his "matchless gift of phrase"--were manifestly out of the ordinary, he became the object of considerable attention in the press, a combination of celebrity and journalist. Mark Twain was a highly adaptable, partly fictional version of Clemens himself. Shortly before he adopted the pseudonym, for instance, he presented himself as a
brash, socially inept reporter whose supposed obtuseness and awkward predicaments supplied the real interest of his amusing report "The Sanitary Ball." . . . This bumbling figure assumed much greater autonomy and complexity when he adopted the name "Mark Twain." In his more exuberant moods he exhibited an extraordinary capacity for ridicule and vituperation, but above all for exaggeration of all kinds. This last element—the reporter's supposed inability to keep the facts straight or to report anything without comic elaboration—became the more prominent element of his public character. The reporter who could be forgiven for making up items about hay wagons and pack trains (as he recalled in Roughing It) soon became one who wrote more pointed hoaxes, and then in turn one who explicitly assumed the role of yarn spinner and teller of tales. (24)

Public perception of Mark Twain was not so benign as Branch's description implies, however. As Fatout says, he was known as

audacious, impulsive, erratic, and haphazard. Given to outrageous eruptions of temper and flagrant personalities, he was neither gentle nor inoffensive. His humor was more slashing than whimsical, and it was never merely quaint. He made
readers take heed, by either amusing them or irritating them, but he was an uncertain quantity, sometimes approaching brilliance, sometimes falling into the commonplace and gauche (33). . . . Mark Twain was fairly well known to the press of the Western country. Though not a general favorite, like Dan De Quille, he had a reputation: as a perplexing mixture of the offhand, irreverent, profane, mad, laughable, and diabolic. Some serious-minded editors dismissed him as only a frivolous fool. Others might gasp at his effrontery, yet they were ready enough to spice their columns with his peppery words lifted from the Enterprise. (44)

But even as the figure of Mark Twain began to take root in the frontier public's imagination, the existence of Sam Clemens as journalist quietly continued. Smith places the work of Clemens/Twain at the Enterprise into four categories:

(1) routine "local" items (enlivened occasionally by hoaxes to which he resorted in the dearth of genuine news, or from sheer exuberance . . . ; (2) an occasional unsigned editorial; (3) letters sent to the paper from Carson City (the territorial capital), San Francisco, and other places; and (4) reports of sessions of the Territorial Legislature
and the Constitutional Convention of 1863 in Carson. (7)

The Disappearance of Sam Clemens

It is possible to separate Sam Clemens and Mark Twain, guided at least somewhat by Smith's categorization. As Smith says, "Although Mark Twain was privileged to say anything—or almost anything—he pleased, Sam Clemens was expected to practice serious journalism, and most of the time he accepted this professional responsibility" (9). The responsible reporter can be seen most clearly—in fact, almost exclusively—in Clemens's legislative reporting, which for the most part sticks to the facts, although he permits himself occasional parenthetical comments signed "Mark" or "Rep." Smith notes, however, that all but two of the known reports from the Constitutional Convention of November 2-December 20, 1863, are headed "Reported in Phonographic Short-Hand for the Territorial Enterprise, by A.J. Marsh and Sam. L. Clemens," implicitly an acknowledgment by the paper of the distinction between Clemens the reporter and Twain the commentator (9). The editorials, too, although unsigned, fall under the category of serious writing, although it is going too far to call them responsible. In fact, by the time that Clemens wrote the fateful editorial that would result in his leaving Virginia City, the Clemens persona had all but disappeared from public consciousness; in referring to the
author of the editorial, other newspapers uniformly spoke of "Mark Twain."
The local columns are also unsigned, but it is evident from such items as "The Sanitary Ball" that they show the spark of humor that distinguished Mark Twain. Certainly the hoaxes can be ascribed to Twain rather than Clemens; they can by no means be characterized as serious reporting, although Twain made claims of serious intentions for both "The Petrified Man" and the "Bloody Massacre Near Carson." As for the correspondence, there can be no doubt: it is undeniably humorous, and most of it is signed "Mark Twain." Thus it can be said that of the four classes of work Smith attributes to Clemens/Twain during his stay at the Enterprise, only the legislative reporting can truly be said to have been the work of Sam Clemens.

Dan De Quille

The atmosphere that allowed such a variety of work to be published seems to have been unique to the Territorial Enterprise. Certainly, the raucous nature of life in Virginia City encouraged the sometimes casual approach to journalism taken by the paper, but it was editor Joe Goodman who allowed the Enterprise writers such free rein. Sam Clemens was not Goodman's only writer whose imagination sometimes soared beyond the bounds of the factual. Twain's colleague on the paper and predecessor as local editor, Dan De Quille, presumably had already set the precedent for fanciful writing.
at the Enterprise; although there is little if any direct
evidence of this, since there are no files of the paper
dating from this time, the inference can be drawn from the
character of De Quille's writings that appeared in the San
Francisco Golden Era at this time and earlier, and from De
Quille's later writings at the Enterprise.

De Quille had preceded Sam Clemens at the paper by about
four months; the former began working there in June of 1862,
the latter sometime after the first week of September.
William Wright was born May 9, 1829, in Knox County, Ohio,
the first of nine children of Paxton and Lucy Wright. When
Will was eighteen, his family moved west, to Muscatine
County, Iowa, near West Liberty. Paxton Wright died soon
after the move, leaving Will to head the family. In 1853, at
age 24, Will married Caroline Coleman and moved to a farm
nearby given to him by an uncle. The Wrights had five
children in the next four years; three of them, son Paxton
and daughters Mell and Lura, survived Will Wright. During
this time, Wright began writing letters and sketches for Iowa
newspapers.

Like Sam Clemens, Will Wright had hoped to become rich
through prospecting; in 1857, he traveled to the West Coast
for what he expected would be just a few months, until he had
amassed enough money to be comfortable back home. (He would
not move back to Iowa permanently until 1897, in severely
decreasing health.) From 1857 to 1860, he and his brother Hank
prospected in California and Nevada; meanwhile, Will had begun submitting humorous correspondence to hometown and western newspapers under the pen name Dan De Quille. As Richard A. Dwyer and Richard E. Lingenfelter explain in Dan De Quille The Washoe Giant, "In picking this monicker, he was not only punning on his real name and chosen profession, he was bidding to compete with such other American humorists who called themselves Petroleum V. Nasby, Artemus Ward, and Orpheus C. Kerr among others" (11). De Quille's writings found particular favor at the San Francisco Golden Era, which published an average of one De Quille piece a week between the fall of 1860 and the spring of 1862, shortly before he began work on the Enterprise.

Early in June of 1860 (about the same time as J. Ross Browne's visit), Dan De Quille migrated to Washoe, the popular name for what would eventually become Nevada. Although his prospecting there never did pan out, his literary career was reasonably successful; he wrote regularly for the Golden Era as its mining correspondent. According to Dwyer and Lingenfelter,

His letters contained not only the highlights of the local news, but vivid, often comic, sketches of life in the mines that still make lively reading today. . . . One trip to the east across the Carson Sink and up to a camp called Silver Hill in the summer of 1861 provided him with enough material
for a book-length series of articles entitled "Washoe Rambles," which has been suggested as a model for Mark Twain's *Roughing It*. (12)

During this time, Dan De Quille was published not only in the western press, but also in the Cedar Falls Gazette back home in Iowa and in the New York Knickerbocker Magazine. But it was his work in the *Golden Era* that attracted the attention of Joe Goodman and Denis McCarthy, who in June of 1862 invited him to join their paper, the *Territorial Enterprise* (5-16).

**De Quille's Dissipation**

Scholars generally, and incorrectly, state that De Quille worked at the *Enterprise* continuously and benignly until it went out of business in 1893, but as Dwyer and Lingenfelter point out in *Dan De Quille The Washoe Giant*, his career was anything but tranquil or unbroken. They single out as an example of this misreading of his career the assertion by Fatout that

he was a man of mild disposition and placid temper that made him a stabilizer, a sort of presiding genius or mentor of the whole unruly crew. A model craftsman, he practiced methodical work habits and exercised a meticulous care for accuracy. Because he was shy, gentle, loath to offend, his humorous pieces, which he called "quaints," were droll, whimsical, puckish, sometimes mildly sentimental.
At the time, he was the best known, best liked, and most promising writer on the paper, having published many sketches in *The Golden Era* and attracted the attention of the New York *Knickerbocker Magazine*. Nevertheless, he made no effort to seek a national audience; contented with his berth in Virginia [City], he remained there until the *Enterprise* died in 1893. (33)

As Dwyer and Lingenfelter describe De Quille’s life, there is much that is wrong with this picture.¹ They cite the diaries of fellow Comstock journalist Alf Doten as evidence of De Quille’s propensity for violence and of his frequent close encounters with alcohol. “The two were drinking partners, frequently cruising until daybreak, and Alf regularly records Dan’s disabilities, hangovers, bouts of delirium, fist fights, and hospital sojourns” (23). Doten often records De Quille’s lapses:

On April 4, 1867, Doten records that De Quille “got into a muss while drunk at Wood’s Bank Exchange about 4 o’clock this morning in the course of which he called Billy Gregory a ‘son of a bitch’—Billy struck him with his fist full on the right cheek, laying it open some and blacking his right eye, swelling his nose, & darkening his left eye a little—I had to localize for him this evening & will for 3 or 4 days till he gets once more
presentable." But within ten days, De Quille and Doten "went to Chinatown & all the white whore houses in that direction." (24-25)

Dwyer and Lingenfelter cite numerous other episodes:
April 24, 1867, De Quille drunk and unable to write a decent column; December 16, De Quille given a black eye in a fight; July 5, 1869, "after a big Independence Day, 'Dan De Quille got discharged this morning by Joe Goodman--He had been very dissipated of late, and got up a dissipated local--He will send Dan out in the country to sober up, as he can't do it here"; April 7, 1870, De Quille in jail, suffering from delirium tremens; laid off for drunkenness for two months, beginning in March of 1871; again laid off for drinking, six months beginning in August of 1872 (25).

Nor had De Quille been any stranger to drink during the time that Sam Clemens worked at the Enterprise, though he may not have been so thoroughly dissipated yet. During the visit of Artemus Ward, for instance, in December of 1863, liquor flowed freely, and Ward socialized almost exclusively with members of the Enterprise staff. "Dropping in late at night after a speaking engagement, he peeled off his coat and helped pull the local columns so that he and the boys could go out on the town without needless delay" (Fatout 123). Fatout also quotes a letter from Twain to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, written January 28, 1871, recalling a party at Barnum's restaurant during Ward's visit at which he and De
Quille were present, featuring "such tautology and repetition of empty bottles everywhere visible as to be offensive to the sensitive eye." The evening culminates with a toast by Ward:

"Let every man 'at loves his fellow man and 'preciates a poet 'at loves his fellow man, stan' up!--stan' up and drink health and long life to Thomas Bailey Aldrich!--and drink it stanning!" (On all hands fervent, enthusiastic, and sincerely honest attempts to comply.) Then Artemus: "Well--consider it stanning, and drink it just as ye are!"

Which was done. (127)

Still, at the time De Quille and Twain worked together at the Enterprise, his drinking does not seem to have gotten too much in the way of his work. In fact, his reputation outstripped that of Twain, at least as far as talent was concerned. Fatout notes an item in the Gold Hill Daily News of December 23, 1863, declaring that "Artemus is a 'brick,' and socially as social as the jolliest. Dan De Quille and Artemus Ward! To see the two tipping glasses together! 'Tis worth five dollars to see it" (125).

Even Joe Goodman, editor of the Enterprise, expected more of De Quille than of Sam Clemens. In his Biography, Albert Bigelow Paine quotes Goodman as saying,

"If I had been asked to prophesy which of the two men, Dan de Quille or Sam, would become distinguished, I should have said De Quille. Dan
was talented, industrious, and, for that time and place, brilliant. Of course, I recognized the unusualness of Sam’s gifts, but he was eccentric and seemed to lack industry; it is not likely that I should have prophesied fame for him then.” (216)

**De Quille’s Influence on Twain**

It is most unlikely that De Quille’s writing did not exert some influence on Sam Clemens’s; in *The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain*, Edgar M. Branch explicitly asserts that De Quille’s influence was of great importance (105). Branch is incorrect in asserting that “conceivably Dan’s ‘Traveling Stones of Pahrangat Valley’ or his solar armor story may have stimulated Mark Twain to write his own hoaxes” (“Traveling Stones” was written in 1867 and “Solar Armor” appeared in 1874, according to Dwyer and Lingenfelter), and his citation of Bernard De Voto’s claim in *Mark Twain’s America* (151-52) that a certain passage from De Quille’s *The Big Bonanza* could be passed off as Twain’s ignores the fact that De Quille wrote much of the book while staying at Twain’s house in Hartford during the summer of 1875. He does, however, appropriately comment on “the ring of much that Mark Twain wrote in Washoe” in De Quille’s “Petrified! Or the Stewed Chicken Monster,” which was written in 1863.

Drawing from De Quille’s correspondence with the *Cedar Falls Gazette* in Iowa, much of it written before Sam Clemens
joined the *Enterprise*, Branch notes their use of "similar subjects, such as emigrant trains, theater reports, spirit rappings, mine yields, new strikes, judicial squabbles, court trials, prison escapes, duels, thefts, and murders" (106). Much of this is, of course, what any Virginia City correspondent or local columnist would write about. It is, simply, what was happening; it was the news. But Branch goes on to describe subjects used by De Quille that would later be dealt with by Mark Twain:

Dan DeQuille described his troubles with a cantankerous horse, Pi-Ute, on a visit to a ghost mining town. He told of his adventures on a prospecting trip with Tom and Pike. Dan and Tom staged a fake Indian attack to scare Pike. Later they persuaded him that he had dreamed it all, as Huck persuaded Jim, and Pike re-enacted the dream, posing as the hero. . . . He made insinuations against good little boys, and he threatened children. . . . Like Mark Twain he believed that nose-wiping, over-eating, blood and gore, and the smells of Steamboat Springs were inherently comic. He wrote about the sort of "borrowing" Huck Finn excelled in. He ridiculed the "blubbering" of his discomfited enemies, targets for his slurs and preposterous charges. . . . In terms remarkably
similar to those used by Mark Twain several years later, Dan DeQuille satirized lax law enforcement in Washoe. . . . Also DeQuille vigorously criticized inefficient legislators and the excesses of local politics. (106)

Of course, it is impossible to say for certain how much of an influence De Quille had on Clemens, but considering their positions as the two most prominent Comstock humorists, their close working conditions (they wrote at the same table in the Enterprise office), and their social circumstances (they roomed together after De Quille returned from his trip east), it would be unlikely if neither had influenced the other.²

Branch concludes:

It is clear that Mark Twain’s Nevada writing was strongly tempered by Sagebrush humor, as seen specifically in the work of Dan DeQuille. Why he wrote as he did may never be known for sure, but we may guess with some certainty that the success of his fellow journalists led him to adopt their manner. It should be remembered, of course, that his writing was in part a development of his previous journalism and was stimulated by the impulse toward expression which he always possessed. (109)
More simply put, what Mark Twain wrote in Nevada was partly the result of what he brought with him and partly the result of what he found there. How he put that combination of influences to work, producing a sometimes incongruous, sometimes questionable, sometimes volatile blend of imagination, humor, and journalism, is the subject of the following chapter.
NOTES

1 Dwyer and Lingenfelter are not entirely innocent of misleading readers, either. They incorrectly assert that Sam Clemens began work at the Enterprise in August 1862 (16); the date is actually accepted as being sometime in September. They also claim that Twain "first got into trouble with his account of the 'Sanitary Ball,' intimating that its proceeds would be sent to foster interracial marriage in the East. And the climax of his brief Comstock career came with his notorious 'Massacre at Dutch Nick's,' in which the clues to the hoax were overwhelmed by the tasteless details of blood and guts" (20). It is true that "The Sanitary Ball" (January 10, 1863) preceded "A Bloody Massacre near Carson" (October 28, 1863), but the assertion that proceeds from a ball given to benefit the Sanitary Fund were to be sent to a miscegenation society appeared in the Enterprise on May 18, 1864 (Smith 199). To call the Empire City massacre hoax the "climax of his brief Comstock career" is also incorrect; the events of May 1864—the miscegenation society allegations and Twain's dispute with the publisher of the Virginia Daily Union—more aptly meet that description.
2 Branch (108) and Dwyer and Lingenfelter (20-21) suggest that Clemens also had an influence on De Quille.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF MARK TWAIN'S CAREER
AT THE TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE

Footloose Journalism at the Enterprise

The lawlessness that characterized life on the Nevada frontier—the claim-jumping, the alcoholic intemperance, the violence—carried into contemporary journalism as well. Newspapers indulged in feuds, criticizing and sometimes even insulting each other in their editorials. In the summer of 1863, Joe Goodman, editor of the Territorial Enterprise, and Tom Fitch, editor of the Virginia Daily Union, went so far as to carry out a duel in which Goodman shot Fitch in the leg, laming him permanently, after Fitch challenged Goodman for attacking him in print (Paul Fatout, Mark Twain in Virginia City 85). Even when matters did not go to that extreme, papers liberally peppered their news copy with opinion, humor, and downright fiction, often without worrying excessively over the effect on their credibility with readers.

If a footloose attitude characterized Nevada frontier journalism, and if the Territorial Enterprise embodied that attitude more thoroughly than other newspapers, Mark Twain
could be said to embody that attitude more thoroughly than other writers at the Enterprise. Certainly Dan De Quille and his “quaints” occupy a place of distinction in terms of imaginative journalism, but the contemporary reputation of Mark Twain for outrageousness in print as well as in behavior outstripped De Quille’s long before Twain left the paper. (The circumstances of his departure did nothing but enhance this reputation.) Twain was not only adept at generating controversy; he also had a talent for defending his writing with arguments that had a veneer of altruism. But examination of several examples of Twain’s writing at the Enterprise reveals that he was often motivated at least in part by petty personal issues.

The “Petrified Man” Hoax

Sam Clemens, as he was still known, launched his trip into journalistic controversy almost immediately upon starting work at the Enterprise, with his “Petrified Man” hoax of October 4, 1862. Clemens had, after all, been hired on the strength of his humorous “Josh” letters and must have been given some latitude in which to exercise his imagination. In addition, journalistic hoaxing was not unprecedented on the Western frontier; Branch and Hirst point out that a report of a petrified man had appeared in 1858 in the San Francisco Alta California. That story, titled “Extraordinary and Shocking Death of Miner,”
purports to be a letter from Dr. Friedrich Lichtenberger, M.D., Ph.D., who describes the rapid silification of Ernest Flucterspiegel, a miner in the Frazer River area, who broke open a geode and incautiously drank the "water of crystallization" it contained. Within two and one-half hours Flucterspiegel was "inflexible." . . . The silicic acid in the geode water had reacted with "the conjugated acids of the bile, (acting as an alkali) and with the albuminose of the ingesta," and had formed a "silicate of albumen" with the blood. The doctor announced his intention to send specimens of the body to the Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia for examination. (Edgar Marquess Branch and Robert H. Hirst, eds., The Works of Mark Twain: Early Tales & Sketches, Vol. 1 157-58)

In fact, it was the unbridled reporting of supposed natural wonders that Clemens later claimed to have been parodying in his hoax. Branch and Hirst note that in an article for the Galaxy in July of 1870, Clemens said he had "wanted to 'destroy' what he called a growing mania among newsmen for reporting 'extraordinary petrifications and other natural marvels. One could scarcely pick up a paper without finding in it one or two glorified discoveries of this kind'" (157). Although they find no evidence to support this claim in Western newspapers before 1862, they attribute their
failure to the rarity of surviving copies of these papers; they do, however, find an abundance of such stories after 1862, leading them to believe that they were probably plentiful before then as well. "Obviously," say Branch and Hirst, "such reports of 'marvels' shade off into deliberately tall stories and hoaxes" (157).

Clemens reported the story of the petrified man this way in the Enterprise:

A petrified man was found some time ago in the mountains south of Gravelly Ford. Every limb and feature of the stony mummy was perfect, not even excepting the left leg, which has [sic] evidently been a wooden one during the lifetime of the owner—which lifetime, by the way came to a close about a century ago, in the opinion of a savan who has examined the defunct. The body was in a sitting posture, and leaning against a huge mass of croppings; the attitude was pensive, the right thumb resting against the side of the nose; the left thumb partially supported the chin, the forefinger pressing the inner corner of the left eye and drawing it partly open; the right eye was closed, and the fingers of the right hand spread apart. This strange freak of nature created a profound sensation in the vicinity, and our informant states that by request, Justice Sewell or
Sowell, of Humboldt City, at once proceeded to the spot and held an inquest on the body. The verdict of the jury was that "deceased came to his death from protracted exposure," etc. The people of the neighborhood volunteered to bury the poor unfortunate, and were even anxious to do so; but it was discovered, when they attempted to remove him, that the water which had dripped upon him for ages from the crag above, had coursed down his back and deposited a limestone sediment under him which had glued him to the bed rock upon which he sat, as with a cement of adamant, and Judge S. refused to allow the charitable citizens to blast him from his position. The opinion expressed by his Honor that such a course would be little less than sacrilege, was eminently just and proper. Everybody goes to see the stone man, as many as three hundred having visited the hardened creature during the past five or six weeks. (159)

Despite his recollections eight years later, Clemens wrote to his brother Orion on October 21, 1862, telling a different, and less laudable, story of why he wrote the hoax:

It is an unmitigated lie, made from whole cloth. I got it up to worry Sewall. Every day, I send him some California paper containing it; moreover, I am getting things so arranged that he will soon begin
to receive letters from all parts of the country, purporting to come from scientific men, asking for further information concerning the wonderful stone man. If I had plenty of time, I would worry the life out of the poor cuss. (155)

Although Clemens's claims to Orion smack of boastfulness, on balance they ring truer than his later assertion that he was driven by a noble (though trivial) cause. He had nothing to hide from the public at the beginning of his career; in fact, he could not have known at this point that it was the beginning of his career. Nor, even had he felt the need to hide his true motivation, would he have needed to do so in a private letter to a family member. Further, the radical change in his story seems strongly revisionist. Clemens's strivings for respectability about the time of the Galaxy piece (it appeared four months after his marriage to Olivia Langdon) are well-documented, not least by himself. It would appear more acceptable to polite society to have written in the interest of bettering the practice of journalism than to have simply been carrying out a personal grudge. He does admit in the Galaxy that hatred of Sewall played a part in the hoax, but he claims it was a secondary motive.

Although scholars have found no concrete evidence to indicate what Clemens's grudge against Sewall might have been, Branch and Hirst suggest a clash over mining rights or
perhaps political differences—apparently Sewall was a strong Unionist (156). Whatever the reason, the result seems to be another outcropping of Clemens's unfortunate tendency to allow his personal feelings to make their way into print, a tendency that he had exhibited a decade earlier in the "Dog be-Deviled Citizen" episode. The fabrication of the "petrified man" was picked up by at least a dozen papers, many of which did not question its veracity. Branch and Hirst report:

Of the twelve California and Nevada papers that are known to have reprinted "Petrified Man," eight of them gave no sign whatever that they doubted the truth of the story. San Francisco newspapers were shrewd enough: the Alta called it a "sell" and the Evening Bulletin "A Washoe Joke." But the Sacramento Bee asserted more tentatively that it was "probably a hoax," and the Bulletin reported that "the interior journals seem to be copying [it] in good faith." (Sketches 158)

Had any of these papers examined the position of the corpse, they might not have been so easily fooled; Clemens placed the body in such a position that it was winking and thumbing its nose.

**The "Bloody Massacre" Hoax**

Although some newspapers were taken in by the story of the petrified man, it did not cause nearly the disturbance
that Clemens's other known hoax did. "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson" and its author, by this point known as Mark Twain, became immediately and widely notorious. The story was picked up by such newspapers as the neighboring Gold Hill Daily News, as well as by the Reese River Reveille, the San Francisco Bulletin, and the Sacramento Union. "A Bloody Massacre," too long to quote in full, tells of "a man named P. Hopkins, or Philip Hopkins, [who] has been residing with his family in the old log house just at the edge of the great pine forest which lies between Empire City and Dutch Nick’s." Twain reports that Hopkins had ridden into Carson City, "with his throat cut from ear to ear, and bearing in his hand a reeking scalp from which the warm, smoking blood was still dripping," and collapsed in front of the Magnolia Saloon, where he soon died. It was then discovered that the scalp belonged to his wife, whom he had killed along with seven of their nine children. Hopkins had been driven mad, the story indicates, by the fact that he had sold all his stock in Nevada mining companies for fear that dividends were being "cooked," or funded with surreptitiously borrowed money, and had invested in the Spring Valley Water Company of San Francisco, whose stock had then plummeted--because it was discovered its dividends were being "cooked." Twain castigates the San Francisco newspapers for not having exposed the fraud before the tragedy occurred (Sketches 324-26).
As Branch and Hirst report, "it seems that the almost universal reaction to the unsigned item was credulous horror, swiftly followed by anger and outrage when the hoax was discovered" (320). The anger was so intense that Mark Twain published a retraction in the next day’s paper, headed "I Take It All Back":

The story published in the Enterprise reciting the slaughter of a family near Empire was all a fiction. It was understood to be such by all acquainted with the locality in which the alleged affair occurred. In the first place, Empire City and Dutch Nick’s are one, and in the next there is no "great pine forest" nearer than the Sierra Nevada mountains. But it was necessary to publish the story in order to get the fact into the San Francisco papers that the Spring Valley Water company was "cooking" dividends by borrowing money to declare them on for its stockholders. The only way you can get a fact into a San Francisco journal is to smuggle it in through some great tragedy.¹ (320-21)

Twain also could have mentioned two other clues to the story's being a hoax: that Pete Hopkins was single and that Hopkins himself was the owner of the Magnolia Saloon (491).

The Gold Hill Daily News, which should have seen through the hoax, was among those most thoroughly taken in. Under the
title "HORRIBLE," it commented on page three of the October 28, 1863, issue:

The most sickening tale of horror that we have read for years, is told in the Enterprise of this morning; and were it not for the respectable source from which our cotemporary received it, we should refuse it any credence.

The source to which the paper refers, Abram Curry, should indeed have been reliable; he was a founder and one of the leading residents of Carson City (Sketches 463); unfortunately for the News, Twain had mentioned Curry, as Branch and Hirst say, precisely to increase the plausibility of the story (491). The next day, the News expressed its outrage:

THAT "SELL."

which we yesterday copied in good faith from the "Enterprise," turns out to be a mere "witticism" of Mark Twain. In short, a LIE--utterly, baseless, and without a shadow of foundation. The "Enterprise" is the pioneer newspaper of the Territory, is more widely known than any other, and having been ably and respectably conducted has heretofore been considered a reliable medium of information. The terrible tale related in its columns yesterday, and copied into ours, was believed here, and will be
believed elsewhere—wherever the ENTERPRISE and the NEWS are read. It will be read with sickening horror, and the already bloody reputation of our Territory will receive another smear. When the readers of the soul-sickening story are informed that it was a mere bubble of "wit," they will feel relieved, although they may utterly fail to see the humor or "the point." (3)

Apparently Clemens made a further reply beyond the "I Take It All Back" retraction, for the day after the Daily News's rebuke, on October 30, it had this to say:

STILL HARPING ON.--Mr. Mark Twain is not content to let the memory of his late silly imposition upon the public pass from the minds of men. He received a just, calm, and not abusive rebuke from the Bulletin and he replies with the epithet of "little parson," "oyster-brained idiot," etc. We took exceptions to being made the dupe of his nonsense, and a medium for its dissemination; and because we called his baseless, and worse than idle fabrication by a shorter and more emphatic monosyllable, and spelt the word in small caps, thus—"LIE," the thin-skinned young man is hurt in a tender spot and retorts albeit, he clothes his remarks in a semi-facetious phrase, and feigns to be careless, and even proud of his effort; it is
very patent that is all assumed. As far as his slurring innuendo is concerned, that we find fault with his folly for the purpose of benefitting ourselves at the expense of the Enterprise, it is as absurd and of a piece with the balance of his talk on the subject. The Enterprise does not interfere with us in the least. Were it to cease its publication to-day it would not benefit us to the value of a dollar, nor would its ten-fold increase of circulation (which, through the “wit” of Mark Twain, it will soon obtain) injure us to the amount of a single nickel. Leaving the broad and sidesplitting humor of Mark Twain out of the question, the Enterprise is a most valuable paper, and has our best wishes. As to the patronizing portion of his remarks, we simply “thank him for nothing.” We neither expect to prosper through any patronage of the Enterprise, nor apprehend financial ruin and starvation through the buffoonery of its local columns. (3)

At least one newspaper chose to ridicule the righteous indignation of other editors. The Reese River Reveille said succinctly:

A CANARD.—Some of the papers are expressing astonishment that “Mark Twain,” the local of the Territorial Enterprise, should perpetrate such a
"sell" as "A Bloody Massacre near Carson," a pretended account of which recently appeared in the columns of the Enterprise. They don't know him. We would not be surprised at ANYTHING done by that silly idiot. (November 7, 1863, supplement, 1)

The anger that the hoax aroused took its toll on Clemens, at least temporarily. As Dan De Quille tells the story,

When the California papers . . . found they had been sold there was a howl from Siskiyou to San Diego. Some papers demanded the immediate discharge of the author of the item by the Enterprise proprietors. They said they would never quote another line from that paper while the reporter who wrote the shocking item remained on its force. All this worried Mark as I have never seen him worried. (Dan De Quille The Washoe Giant 208)

Twain's depression over the reaction is attested to by an item in the November 2 issue of the Gold Hill Daily News:

MARK TWAIN.--This favorite writer is "melancholy;" he has got the mulligrubs. "Where be his jibes, now? his gambols? his flashes of merriment that were wont to set Virginia in a roar? Not one now to mock his own grinning? Quite chop-fallen?" (Bully for Shakespeare.) We hav'nt [sic] had a good square joke out of poor Mark these four or five days. He
sits behind that historic pine table morose and melancholy, and drinking mean whisky to drown his misery. Cheer up, friend Mark; the courier brings the welcome news that all is quiet at Dutch Nick’s, the “har” on Mrs. Hopkins’ head is coming out like a new “red” shoe-brush; the murderer has had that gash in his throat caulked and pitched, and the blood in that pine forest is not ankle deep. Awake, Mark! arise, and toot your horn if you don’t sell a claim. (3)

Dan De Quille recalled telling Clemens during the height of the controversy that he should “never mind this bit of a gale; it will soon blow itself out. This item of yours will be remembered and talked about when all your other work is forgotten” (Washoe Giant 208-9). In the short run, the Dutch Nick item did cast a shadow on all of Mark Twain’s other work (as well as on some of De Quille’s). The Gold Hill Daily News apparently enjoyed needling its competitor about the item; an item from November 14, 1863, mentions a copy of the Enterprise that “hangs on the file, mutilated and skulped like unto the family of Hopkins” (2); on November 19, it remarks in an item on the actress Adah Isaacs Menken:

Mark Twain is writing a bloody tragedy for her, equal to Mazeppa—and which will excel Mazeppa in many respects. It is to be called “Pete Hopkins; or, the Gory Scalp.” Mark is now training one of
Balaam's Arabian steeds especially for this play.

(2)

The subject merits mention twice on November 27, and on December 19 the paper remarks in reference to a story by Dan De Quille, "Not since the narrative by the veracious Mark Twain of the massacre at Dutch Nick's have we read a more sorrowful or pathetic tale" (2). The Virginia Daily Union's memory was even longer. On February 20, 1864, it comments:

MAZEPPE.---This popular burlesque still continues to have a great run at Sutliff's Theater. The scene where Mazeppa is proclaimed sole monarch of Empire City is thrilling in the extreme.

As with the "Petrified Man," Twain's motives in writing the "Bloody Massacre" are not clear-cut. In the June 1870 issue of the Galaxy, he repeated the assertion he made in "I Take It All Back" that his purpose had been to expose fraud by the Spring Valley Water Company of San Francisco.

Once more, in my self-complacent simplicity, I felt that the time had arrived for me to rise up and be a reformer. ... And so, under the insidious mask of an invented "bloody massacre," I stole upon the public unawares with my scathing satire upon the dividend-cooking system. (Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, & Essays 1852-1890, 392)

Branch and Hirst are fully convinced of Twain's explanation of why he concocted the hoax, based on a
recolletion by C.A.V. Putnam, who worked with Twain on the Enterprise. In an article in the Salt Lake City Tribune of April 25, 1898, Putnam recalled that, at the suggestion of a friend in San Francisco, he was looking for a way to defend the honor of Washoe mines against attacks by two editors of the San Francisco Evening Bulletin who had been fleeced in a mining stock scam. He also wanted to suggest to the Bulletin that it direct its criticism at targets closer to home, particularly the Spring Valley Water Company, which he had been told was cooking its dividends. Putnam was unable to figure out a sure-fire way to get the San Francisco papers to copy the information he was going to put in the Enterprise. He says he mentioned the problem to Twain, who within a few hours had devised his murder story as a solution (Sketches 322).

Dan De Quille, however, remembered the situation differently in reminiscences published in the California Illustrated Magazine of July 1893.

Mark’s whole object in writing the story was to make the murderer go to Pete Hopkins’s saloon and fall dead in front of it--Pete having in some way offended him. I could never quite see how this was to hurt Pete Hopkins. Mark probably meant to insinuate that the murderer had been rendered insane by the kind of liquor sold over Hopkins’s
bar, or that he was one of Pete's bosom friends.  

(Washoe Giant 209)

De Quille's memory is obviously faulty to some extent; the "Bloody Massacre" explained clearly why the murderer had been driven insane. But his memory is no more faulty than Mark Twain's was in the Galaxy piece, in which he claims that one of the clues to the hoax was the mention of a "dressed-stone mansion" that did not exist; in fact, the story mentions an old log house, but not a mansion of dressed stone or any other kind. De Quille's lapse may or may not invalidate the rest of what he says; probably, though, there is at least some truth in it. Sam Clemens already had a history of injudiciously needling in print those who had offended him, as for instance he had done with J.T. Hinton in 1852 and with G.T. Sewall just a few months earlier. It is possible that "A Bloody Massacre" presents another such case.

In any event, the more overt reason for Twain's having written the story remains the dividend-cooking issue. This motivation, to whatever degree Twain was sincere in claiming it, is journalistically legitimate; the press has a long tradition of exposing corruption, although usually in a more mundane and straightforward way. The means through which Twain chose to expose the water company's fraud seem clever at first glance, but as he so quickly learned, the details of the supposed massacre proved to be of far more interest to readers than the reason behind it. The Gold Hill Daily News'
rewrite relegates any mention of the Spring Valley Water Company to the last five lines of the story, and it contains no reference to the company’s dividend cooking. Although Branch and Hirst report that the Sacramento Union and the San Francisco Evening Bulletin carried the story verbatim, Twain had no guarantee that they would do so, and it is likely that many papers gave a shortened version of the story, possibly leaving out the less salacious details. Items culled from the exchanges were often pared down to fit the space available. With his experience not only at the Enterprise but elsewhere, Twain surely would have known this. In fact, less than six weeks after it published the “Bloody Massacre,” the Enterprise inadvertently demonstrated the danger of this practice. The Gold Hill Daily News of December 3, 1863, gleefully pointed out the problem:

An Oversight.

The Enterprise of this morning contains an announcement clipped from the Esmeralda Star to the effect that the town of Aurora had been destroyed by fire. This is an error and was probably caused by an oversight, in not reading the whole article. Our neighbor only clipped the first paragraph, which is as follows:

AURORA IN ASHES.—We are compelled to chronicle the lamentable fact that last night a fire broke out in the wooden building on the corner of Aurora and Antelope streets, which spread
so rapidly over the town, that in half an hour our beautiful
uity [sic] was almost entirely consumed; but few buildings
were saved from the devouring hlement [sic]. The fire might
have been stayed, if there had ben [sic] proper cisterns
provided to supply the Fire Department with water; but there
were none; hence the destrbction [sic] of so much valuable
property.
This is rather startling: but the editor goes on to
say: "Such may be the announcement we may be
compelled to make at any time," and proceeds to
write a lengthy article on the necessity of a fire
department in that town. That is all the matter
with Aurora.

It seems disingenuous of Twain to protest that people
had missed his point when he was probably aware that many
would; it is not impossible that he wrote the story mainly
for the exercise of his imagination but was cautious enough
to include the dividend-cooking matter for exactly the
purpose it served the next day: as a rationale for having put
an entirely fictional piece of work in a newspaper from which
readers expected factual information.

Twain acknowledged in his disclaimer the next day that
the discrepancies he emphasized then (and which he repeated
in 1870) as clues to the reader would have been known to very
few people outside the immediate area. Few California editors
would have known that "Empire City and Dutch Nick's are one"
or that "there is no 'great pine forest' nearer than the Sierra Nevada mountains." Thus he admits that the story was designed to be transparent to locals but to fool the San Francisco papers. This method of supposedly exposing the truth by disseminating a lie is a tricky business at best; it is certainly poor journalism, and hardly a laudable action in any case. In this instance, Mark Twain broke faith with readers; the result was a loss of face both for him and for the newspaper.

**Mark Twain on the Duties of the Press**

But Twain was also able to play the crusading journalist in a more orderly and straightforward way. In at least two dispatches that have survived, he discusses the freedoms and responsibilities of the press, emphasizing the ability of newspapers to act in the interest of the public by exposing abuses both by governmental bodies and by private businesses. The first of these articles involves a set of accusations and counteraccusations concerning overcharges by a Carson City undertaker. In a dispatch published February 13, 1864, Twain quotes the Carson City *Independent* as saying:

"Our friend, Mark Twain, is such a joker that we cannot tell when he is really in earnest [a jab at Twain’s massacre hoax a year earlier, possibly]. He says in his last letter to the ENTERPRISE, that our undertaker charges exorbitantly for his services— as much as $150 for a pine coffin, and $50 for a
grave—and is astonished that the Independent has not, ere this, said something about this extortion. As yet we have had no occasion for a coffin or a bit of ground for grave purposes, and therefore know nothing about the price of such things. If any of our citizens think they have been imposed upon in this particular, it is their duty to ventilate the matter. We have heard no complaints." (Henry Nash Smith, Mark Twain of the Enterprise 159)

An apparently outraged Twain replies:

It is their duty—the duty of the citizens—to ferret out abuses and correct them, is it? Correct them through your advertising columns and pay for it—is that it? And then turn to your second page and find one of your insipid chalk-milk editorials, defending the abuse and apologizing for the perpetrator of it; or when public sentiment is too well established on the subject, pretending, as in the above case, that you are the only man in the community who don't know anything about it. Where did you get your notion of the duties of a journalist from? Any editor in the world will say it is your duty to ferret out these abuses, and your duty to correct them. What are you paid for? what use are you to the community? what are you fit
for as a conductor of a newspaper, if you cannot do these things? . . . (Smith 160)

Whatever personal sensitivities may be involved here (Twain goes on to mention the massacre hoax specifically), his instincts are sound. The idea of the press as a watchdog protecting the people is fundamental to American journalism, and Twain calls his opponent’s bluff. He defends his hoax as “a sarcasm upon the San Francisco Water Company, and the iniquity of ‘cooking dividends’” (160), implying that although the Independent has failed to carry out its duty, he has not failed in his. In fact, he says, in criticizing the hoax, the Independent has failed to recognize a journalist doing his job, just as it has failed to recognize its own duty in the present instance. “The editor of the Independent says he don’t know anything about this undertaker business,” Twain says (161). “If he would go and report a while for some responsible newspaper, he would learn the knack of finding out things.”

Mark Twain’s Argument for Moving the Capital

Twain was also capable of expressing his principles more calmly, as in a dispatch to the Enterprise published February 16, 1864, concerning the need to move the capital out of Carson City (where it is still located today):

My first and best reason for thinking the Capital ought to be removed is, that while it remains in Carson, the Legislative Assembly is beyond the pale
of newspaper criticism—beyond its restraining influence, and consequently beyond the jurisdiction of the people, in a manner, since the people are left in ignorance of what their servants are doing, and cannot protest against their acts until it is too late. (Smith 163)³

Again, Twain's argument is for the press as watchdog, as agent to protect a public that cannot otherwise protect itself. This dispatch, perhaps because it is less strident, is more convincing than the one previously quoted. Twain is not simply indulging in theatrics, as a skeptic might suspect in the case of the "undertaker" dispatch; he truly seems to be concerned about the role of the press in keeping government responsible to the people.

However, as in the case of the hoaxes, the issues here are not entirely clear-cut. In saying that the Legislature is "beyond the pale of newspaper criticism," Twain clearly implies that there is no newspaper in Carson City, an assertion that virtually all his readers must have recognized as false, especially since the Carson Daily Independent had editorialized against removal of the capital and apparently had been mentioned in the Enterprise as having done so. The Virginia Daily Union of February 19, 1864, has this to say:

A few days ago, the Independent, a Carson newspaper, fairly asserted the claims of its own city as the Capital of the Territory. In the
performance of its duty in this respect the Independent alluded to the course of the VIRGINIA DAILY UNION, and to that of the Territorial Enterprise on matters concerning the city of Carson. In reply to the Independent, the Enterprise strikes right upon its most available level of style, malignantly runs down upon the Carson craft, and viciously endeavors to "impugn our motives" (2).

The Union also dismisses the idea that the Legislature could escape scrutiny by the Virginia City papers:

It was our duty, perhaps, to have noticed the argument of the Enterprise in favor of the removal of the Capital; but we thought it too ridiculous, as well as derogatory to the character of the Legislature, to bring out a leading topic in legislative deliberation. That paper has said that the Capital should be removed, because Carson was sixteen miles distant from the influence of the press of this city! Such is the argument of the Enterprise. In view of the fact that the UNION is able, as the proceedings will show in numerous instances, to affect the Legislature in matters relating to the public good, at the distance of sixteen miles, we could not with any display of self respect join the Enterprise, which has neither
influence nor patronage in Carson, and demand the removal of the Capital.

Correspondence from “Carl,” the Union’s reporter in Carson City (actually Clement T. Rice, whom Twain referred to in humorous letters as “the Unreliable”), offers ample evidence of the press’s ability to keep an eye on the Legislature; and Mark Twain himself, also on the legislative beat at the time, had the same opportunity to comment in letters as well as in bracketed insertions in his reports on the body’s proceedings. And comment he did, as in this dispatch dated February 8, 1864:

This bill appears—to a man up a tree—to be a bill of sale of Nevada Territory to the California State Telegraph Company. They never print this kind of bills—wherefore I shall have to copy it myself for you. It flashed through the House under a suspension of the rules before you could wink, they tell me. (Smith 153)

Assuming that Smith is correct in attributing the piece to Twain, the question arises: What were Twain’s motives behind his advocacy of moving the capital? His own work seems to contradict his argument that the press cannot adequately keep an eye on the Legislature from a distance (albeit a short one); the implication that there was no newspaper in Carson City is demonstrably false, as he well knew, although his criticism of the Independent’s investigative ability
quoted previously shows his contempt for that paper. It may be that this letter was written in that same spirit. The lack of mention of the Independent, coupled with the assertions that a local press is needed to keep an eye on lawmakers and that the Legislature needs to be moved to Virginia City for that to happen, could be a subtle way of continuing his criticism of the Independent, by implicitly branding it a non-newspaper. If this was Twain's intention, the attempt backfired, for his words were taken at face value by his colleagues at competing local newspapers. Neither paper seems to have noticed his snub of the Carson City newspaper.

The Sanitary Fund Controversies

It was more overt criticism that finally got Mark Twain into such trouble that he felt he had to leave Virginia City. The tangled chain of events involves two intertwining controversies, both related to charity efforts by the Sanitary Fund to raise money for aid to injured Union soldiers and at least one resulting from Twain's penchant for fabricating information. Smith offers a helpful chronology of the events (25–27), from which the following is adapted and enlarged:

- **April 20, 1864**: As the result of an election bet, Ruel C. Gridley carries a fifty-pound sack of flour a mile and a quarter between Austin and Clifton, after which he suggests that the sack be auctioned off for the benefit of the Sanitary Fund (Fatout 185).
May 16: The flour sack, having been sold and resold at Austin, bringing in $5,335, and Virginia, bringing in $580, is put up for sale in Gold Hill. The Gold Hill Daily News remarks the next day: "'Tone' was given to the procession by the presence of Gov. Twain and his staff of bibulous reporters, who came down in a free carriage, ostensibly for the purpose of taking notes, but in reality in pursuit of free whiskey." The sack is carried from one town to the next throughout the day, with proceeds eventually reaching $30,000. In Virginia City, the Daily Union outbids the Enterprise by $200 to $150 while Mark Twain is away from the auction (Fatout 187-91).

May 17: Twain writes an editorial (not extant) suggesting that "the reason the Flour Sack was not taken from Dayton to Carson, was because it was stated that the money raised at the Sanitary Fancy Dress Ball recently held in Carson for the St. Louis Fair, had been diverted from its legitimate course, and was to be sent to aid a Miscegenation Society somewhere in the East; and it was feared the proceeds of the sack might be similarly disposed of" (Virginia Daily Union, May 26, 1864, 2).

May 18: While editor Joe Goodman is out of town, the Enterprise runs the following item:

HOW IS IT?--While we had no representative at the mass meeting on Monday evening, the UNION overbid us for the flour--or at least ex-Alderman Bolan bid
for that paper, and said that he would be responsible for the extra hundred dollars. He may have an opportunity, as we are told that the UNION (or its employees, whichever it is,) has repudiated the bid. We would like to know about this matter, if we may make so free. (Quoted in Virginia Daily Union, May 19, 1864, 2)

Also on May 18, four women who had sponsored the Carson City ball write indignantly to the Enterprise, lambasting the notion that the ball’s proceeds are to go to any cause other than “the aid of the sick and wounded soldiers, who are fighting the battles of our country.” The Enterprise declines to publish the letter; it appears in the Daily Union May 25 and 26.

• May 19: The Union responds to “How Is It?” with “’HOW IS IT?’—HOW IT IS,” listing the names of employees who pledged and the amounts they promised, along with a statement from the treasurer of the Sanitary Fund that the amounts have been paid in full. The Union accuses the Enterprise of being slow to fulfill pledges it has made in the past, “thus furnishing another evidence that its chief characteristic is impulsiveness which immediately cools after expression, leaving the vehicle flat, foolish and fretful” (2). It also accuses the Enterprise of a breach of professional etiquette in aiming its accusations at the employees of the Union instead of the “UNION office.”
- **May 20**: Twain writes to his sister-in-law, Mollie, who was one of the women who organized the ball, that he had been drinking when he wrote the editorial and it had been printed by mistake. He says, however, that he cannot bring himself to apologize in public (Smith 26).

- **May 21**: An item in the *Union* signed "PRINTER" (whose identity turns out to be J.W. Wilmington) denies accusations, apparently printed in an *Enterprise* editorial, that *Union* employees paid their pledges only after being shamed by the *Enterprise* into doing so. It says of the unsigned editorial's author:

> In asserting that we "Had not intended to pay the bill, but on secondary consideration, and for the sake of saving an entirely imaginary reputation for virtue and honesty, concluded to do so," he has endeavored to misinterpret the generous, patriotic promptings of laboring men who gave their little mite willingly; and in so doing he has proved himself an unmitigated liar, a poltroon and a puppy. (2)

On the same page, an editorial accuses the *Enterprise* of having only "pretended to contribute" to the Sanitary Fund. "It has paid nothing of the contributions which it, with great self-show, promised--always in the presence of a crowd." It repeats, in emotional terms, its assertion that the *Enterprise* writer has gone too far:
Never before, in a long period of newspaper intercourse--never before in any contact with a cotemporary [sic], however unprincipled he might have been, have we found an opponent in statement or in discussion who had no gentlemanly sense of professional propriety, who conveyed in every word, and in every purpose of all his words, such a groveling disregard for truth, decency and courtesy, as to seem to court the distinction only of being understood as a vulgar liar. Meeting one who prefers falsehood; whose instincts are all toward falsehood; whose thought is falsification; whose aim is vilification through insincere professions of honesty; one whose only merit is thus described, and who evidently desires to be thus known, the obstacles presented are entirely insurmountable, and whoever would touch them fully, should expect to be abominably defiled.

Inspired by these two articles in the Union, Mark Twain writes to J.L. Laird, one of the paper's owners, claiming authorship of the "How Is It" editorial and challenging Laird to a duel if he does not print a retraction. An exchange of correspondence ensues in which Wilmington claims credit for the "Printer" letter and says he has nothing to retract. Laird refuses to be baited and declines to duel--unless Twain engages in a duel with Wilmington first. Steve Gillis, an
Enterprise printer and Mark Twain's second, attempts to insult Wilmington so that he will be provoked into challenging Gillis to a duel. (The correspondence is reprinted in Smith 191-96.)

**May 23:** Twain writes to Mrs. W.K. Cutler of Carson City, explaining that because he is involved in a quarrel with the Union staff, it is not the proper time for him to be making a public apology to the women who organized the Sanitary Fund Ball. He also thanks Mrs. Cutler for remaining friendly with Mollie, unlike some of the other Carson City women (Smith 26).

**May 24:** The Enterprise publishes the flurry of correspondence written three days earlier, along with another denunciation of Laird by Twain. The paper also published an editorial by Twain, titled "Miscegenation," apologizing to the ladies of Carson after all, and admitting that we [i.e., Twain] resemble the majority of our species in the respect that we are very apt to get entirely in the wrong, even when there is no seeming necessity for it; but to offset this vice, we claim one of the virtues of our species, which is that we are ready to repair such wrongs when we discover them. (Smith 197-98)
The same afternoon, the Gold Hill Daily News publishes two editorials ridiculing the affair, one calling it "a bad egg" and the other stating:

As we go to press, a rumor is rife in town that Pete Hopkins, of Carson, having heard that his friend Mark Twain was about to enter into a contract to be killed, has come to the rescue and assumed the dying part. Pete has had no rest since that terrible massacre at Dutch Nick's, and is desirous of dying a savage death; besides, he thinks he would make a better target than Mark, in which opinion we coincide. Blood, or something else, is likely to grow out of the difficulty, unless the parties can be made to believe, in the language of Bulwer, that "the pen is mightier than the sword." The duel will perhaps come off in the pine forest at Empire City. Horrible! most horrible! (2)

May 25: The Union publishes the letter from the ladies of Carson City. Mark Twain writes to Orion and Mollie that he is open to challenge from three people and awaits answer to a challenge sent to a fourth. Beyond Laird and perhaps Wilmington, their identities are unclear (Smith 26).

May 26: Mark Twain writes to Orion that he and Steve Gillis will leave for "the States" in three days (Smith 27).
**May 28:** Twain sends a note to W.K. Cutler, perhaps offering him "satisfaction." However, only a preliminary draft is extant (Smith 27).

**May 29:** Twain and Gillis leave for San Francisco by stagecoach (Smith 27). No scholar seems to give credence to the story told by both that the duel with Laird was avoided by Gillis's having claimed that Twain had shot the head off a bird at 30 paces; probably it was avoided by their departure.

Mark Twain's almost complete lack of good judgment in this tangle of incidents is almost impossible to explain, but it does bear similarities to his behavior on previous occasions. As he had done back in 1852, in his satire on J.T. Hinton, Twain took advantage of his boss's absence from town to stage his attack. In fourteen years, he might have been expected to mature out of the youthful high spirits that may have been to blame for the Hinton incident; to some extent, as Twain admitted to his sister-in-law, Mollie, other types of spirits were to blame for the miscegenation accusations (Smith 190). But alcohol cannot be the whole excuse for these missteps. Twain's lack of self-censorship has been well documented, from Albert Bigelow Paine on down through Justin Kaplan. At the *Enterprise* he had no Livy or William Dean Howells to restrain him; Dan De Quille was nearly as imaginative as Twain, though less mean-spirited, and editor Joe Goodman seemed impervious to controversy.
The Personal Touch and Its Pitfalls

In most of Twain’s misjudgments, there is at least a hint of personal animosity. This trait appears in the attack on Hinton when Sam Clemens was seventeen; it appears in the ridicule of G.T. Sewall in the “Petrified Man” hoax; if Dan De Quille is to be believed, there was at least an element of animosity against Pete Hopkins in the “Bloody Massacre” hoax; and it was the attack against the staff of the Virginia Daily Union, rather than the “office” of the paper—an attack motivated by Twain’s pique at having been outbid by the Union—that resulted in Twain’s demanding satisfaction of the paper’s senior owner. In short, Twain allowed his personal opinions to enter his work far more than was acceptable to his colleagues, a fact that eventually sent him scrambling for California. Although Twain was generally able to claim altruistic motives in defending his work at the Enterprise, an undercurrent of recklessness in allowing his own feelings to propel his writing is clearly evident. This undercurrent plays a significant role in assessment of whether Twain was an effective, credible newspaper journalist, the final topic remaining to be examined in this study.
NOTES

1 Branch and Hirst note that this text, quoted by them from C.A.V. Putnam's "Dan De Quille and Mark Twain," Salt Lake City Tribune, April 25, 1898, p. 3., "was probably set down from memory, and so may well be impressionistic or incomplete." The original is not extant (321).

2 David Fridtjof Halaas, in Boom Town Newspapers: Journalism on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier, 1859-1881, speculates that "the term 'cotemporary' rather than 'contemporary' was used by the camp press, apparently [as] a humorous reference to the short life expectancy of many mountain journals" (117).

3 Smith notes that this letter was signed by "A Looker-On," rather than by Mark Twain, but he maintains that Twain "almost certainly" was the writer. "Like the author of the letter, Mark Twain had been in Carson City as an observer of the proceedings of the Legislature, and he had discussed removal of the capital, although without strong feeling either for or against the measure. . . . The vivid description of how the Legislature operates bespeaks an author with precisely Mark Twain's recent and prolonged contact with the legislative process" (162). Apparently,
Twain had indeed threatened removal of the capital, although perhaps not entirely in earnest. In a letter to the Union dated January 12, 1864, and printed the following day, Clement T. Rice (Twain's "Unreliable"), writing as "Carl," includes this item:

"Mark Twain" is at his good natured joking again. Yesterday's letter of his, in the Enterprise, half way threatened to move the capital from this pleasant city, if Ormsby county did not repent herself and give a majority for the State and its manifold scenes of plunder. Of course Mark was joking; he only got up that little bit of romance to hide his own "indifference" to the State movement. Carson City will be the capital long after the proposed Constitution is voted down and forgotten (3).

(Smith incorrectly gives the date of the letter as January 11, probably due to the fact that a January 11 letter immediately precedes the one dated the next day.)

4 The Union's characterization of the Enterprise earlier in the same editorial betrays quite a bit of rancor over this issue, and possibly others. It says, "That it never creates or enters a controversy with decency, that it repels with discourtesy only, that it gives personalities and slanders in
refutation of facts and arguments, that it is a constant impugner of others while it fancies that others are busy 'impugning' its 'motives,' and that it habitually assumes the tone of the bully who keeps his hand upon a weapon to bravely assure a crowd that, 'if anybody don't like what I say, they can just take it up!'--are the ordinary truisms applied to the Enterprise."
CHAPTER 6

MARK TWAIN’S CREDIBILITY AS A REPORTER
DURING HIS TENURE AT THE
TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE

Living in a Lawless Climate

It is clear that the often-lawless climate of frontier Nevada in general and Virginia City in particular fostered an often-lawless editorial climate among its newspapers. The bickering among papers, the humorous treatment of news events, the hoaxes and tall tales (particularly by Dan De Quille) are all examples of this tendency; the Goodman-Fitch duel is possibly its most extreme manifestation. Mark Twain partook of this atmosphere, as he did of alcohol during this period, to the extreme. Ultimately, his misjudgment of where the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable journalistic lawlessness lay precipitated his unceremonious departure from town and from the Territorial Enterprise. This misjudgment also is the crucial factor in how one assesses his career at the Enterprise.

Certainly the bulk of Twain’s extant work at the paper does not stray beyond what was acceptable in its frontier surroundings. Reporters in Virginia City and other Nevada towns were not held to stringent standards of factuality, nor
were they required to exhibit more than a minimum of respect or decorum in their writing. Items quoted in Chapter 3—"A Gale," "Due Notice," "The Music," and the reports on the Sanitary Ball and the County Commission—illustrate that Twain could combine humor with reporting to achieve an imaginative yet acceptable product. His legislative reporting proves that he could be extremely competent and workmanlike when circumstances demanded, although he could not resist the temptation to include his private observations in bracketed asides. And surely the bulk of Twain's work at the Enterprise, which is not extant, would prove to be innocuous enough, although it is equally likely that it would show the same imaginative spark as his extant work.

**Ethics in Modern Journalism**

Although it would be unfair to hold Twain to the ethical standards required of journalists today, it is nevertheless instructive to know what those standards are. It should also be remembered that Twain did pay lip service to one of the principles central to American journalism in any period of the nation's history: the need for the press to serve as a watchdog, to keep business (such as the Spring Valley Water Company) and government (such as the Nevada legislature in Carson City) honest. It is implicit that in pursuing this goal the press as an institution, and the individuals who practice journalism, must themselves remain honest. As the
American Society of Newspaper Editors' Statement of Principles expresses it,

The First Amendment, protecting freedom of expression from abridgment by any law, guarantees to the people through their press a constitutional right, and thereby places on newspaper people a particular responsibility.
Thus journalism demands of its practitioners not only industry and knowledge but also the pursuit of a standard of integrity proportionate to the journalist's singular obligation. . . .
The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time. Newspapermen and women who abuse the power of their professional role for selfish motives or unworthy purposes are faithless to that public trust. . . .
Good faith with the reader is the foundation of good journalism. (quoted in William L. Rivers and Cleve Mathews, Ethics for the Media, 235-36)
Likewise the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, states,

Journalists who use their professional status as representatives of the public for selfish or other unworthy motives violate a high trust. . . .
Good faith with the public is the foundation of all worthy journalism. (Rivers and Mathews 237-38)

Journalists themselves are more inclined to recall their transgressions than to expound on the far less readable subject of how they upheld their principles. Twain, in Roughing It, apparently reveled in telling how he learned to turn one modest wagon into a dramatic sixteen, and his recounting in the Galaxy of his hoaxes showed little if any remorse at having fabricated stories. H.L. Mencken, journalism’s great cynic, recalls in Newspaper Days, 1899-1906 how as a cub reporter he fell into a pattern of fabricating news reports, not with the altruistic purposes Twain claimed for his hoaxes, but to pass (as Mencken claims they did) as accurate news reports (260-75). Willa Cather, on the other hand, at least obliquely stood up for the general honesty of newspapers and reporters by reminding readers that newspapers were too busy to indulge in petty personal squabbles. “If reporters were guilty of all the sly and crafty malice with which they are accredited, they would be combinations of Richelieu and Louis XI . . . ;” she wrote in the Lincoln (Nebraska) Journal of December 16, 1894 (The World and the Parish, Vol. 1: Willa Cather’s Articles and Reviews, 1893-1902). “A paper’s main object is to look out for itself, and not to mutilate people’s feelings.”
Nineteenth-Century Ethics

What constitutes the boundary line across which Mark Twain occasionally yet so fatefully stepped? Because newspapers do not customarily make statements of ethics or principles to their readers, defining this line is somewhat tricky. (That fact may have contributed to Mark Twain's difficulty in recognizing it.) In *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America*, Hazel Dicken-Garcia notes the paucity of primary sources that comment directly on how nineteenth-century journalists were expected to behave (4-5). She does, however, point out the comments of Richard Grant White in "The Morals and Manners of Journalism," an article that appeared in the December, 1869, issue of *The Galaxy* (just a few months before Twain published the recollections on his hoaxes in the same publication, implicitly thumbing his nose at the notion of truth as basic to journalism). White, whose article Dicken-Garcia characterizes as the first to deal "almost exclusively with journalistic standards," describes newspaper journalism as the "cheapest defence of nations"; "the surest safeguard of liberty, the most certain antidote against corruption"; the "brain of a community, the organ of its collective thought"; "the chief among the active visible forces of modern civilization"; a "constant guide, a daily counsellor"; . . . a "moving beacon . . . of warning and . . . promise,"
casting its light . . . forward upon the way that must be followed." . . . (158)

Some of these thoughts—journalism as defender of liberty, protector against corruption, beacon of warning—echo the rationalizations Twain attached to his work at the Enterprise. But White also remarks that a journalist’s work must be marked by “candor, good faith, and decency,” qualities that were not evident in Twain’s Enterprise pieces examined in this study. This candor and good faith, White states, “should be absolute, undarkened by the lightest shadow of personal motive, without an iota of swerving”—again, a standard that hardly characterizes certain examples of Mark Twain’s work (213).

Frontier Ethics

The concern with standards extended beyond the distant seat of journalistic power on the East Coast; it apparently was an issue on the frontier, as well. The Gold Hill Daily News, for instance, in its first issue (October 12, 1863), informed readers of its intentions in this editorial:

OUR DUTY, AIM AND PRIVILEGE

We hope that our understanding of the duties of a public journalist whose aims are honest and whose privileges are assumed with motives centered in private interest combined with the common good, is such as to secure to us a friendly public attention and a confidence which will enable us to become an
untiring representative of an enterprising, thoughtful and liberal people. No institution has a higher claim upon the community than the Press, when it is fairly conducted for the advantage of the virtues of the community, and we will consider it our duty, aim and privilege to offer a means of good to all of our neighbors; so that while they are enjoying this advantage they will be actuated by a proud spirit of liberality sufficient to the just maintenance and improvement of their daily newspaper representative. It is not our duty, not our aim, not our privilege, to engender disturbances, or to help up factions, or to advance the vices of party, or to use our columns for creating public enmities to be prolonged by personal controversies. It is not our duty, not our aim, not our privilege, to depend upon the general support while we strive to support special and monopolizing interests, or to overrate politicians, or to defend corrupt officers, or to aid any oppression of poor men and workingmen, or to contend for broad distinctions between capital and labor, or to put a blind on our own opinions to follow, commend and flatter selfish and deceptive leadership. It is not our duty, not our aim, not our privilege, to float our prejudices among the
prejudices of others and call them testimonies of infallible judgment; it is not our duty to question the right of free thought and free language, but it is our privilege and duty to observe and oppose the abuse of that right which cannot be a part of enlightened and lasting liberty unless it be held under a decent and voluntary restraint. No man is so free by the intention and operation of constitutional democratic and republican guarantees, as to be permitted to insult and agitate the community by habitual openness of expressions void of manly constraint, neighborly civility, proper respect for the different sentiments prevailing around him, and gratitude toward the source and continuance of extensive freedom and perfect citizenship.

The writer of this unsigned editorial does not shy away from making the newspaper business sound like a holy calling. To some extent that calling always proves impossible to fulfill as a result of pressure from advertisers and from public opinion, and because of the inability to completely ignore one's own prejudices. However, by publicly stating its principles, the Daily News committed itself to attempt to stand by them; the implication is that any good newspaper will have the same commitment. It is fair to say that the Daily News's statement of principles can stand as a statement
of journalistic standards that can be applied to Nevada frontier newspapers.

In less flowery terms than the writer of the editorial used, the principles of the Daily News include these: to keep personal enmity out of the paper, to stand against corruption and oppression, and to champion the responsible exercise of free speech. In all three of these areas Mark Twain stands on shaky ground.

**Airing Personal Enmities**

Twain's inability to keep his personal enmities out of his newspaper writing is notable. Seventeen-year-old Sam Clemens, of course, had failed in this regard by printing his "Dog be-Deviled Citizen" attacks on competitor J.T. Hinton in 1852 while his boss—his brother Orion—was out of town and Sam was in charge. The problem surfaced again when Clemens, now at the Territorial Enterprise, made sport of G.T. Sewall in the "Petrified Man" hoax, disguising the attack as a satire on the proliferation of petrifaction reports that western newspapers were running. And if Dan De Quille's account contains any truth, Mark Twain's "Bloody Massacre" hoax was written at least in part because Twain wanted to needle bar owner Pete Hopkins, whom he made the central character of the gory piece. But any of these incidents pales against the shabby chain of events that resulted in Mark Twain's departure from Virginia City. Personal feelings probably played a part in the instigation of the feud between
Twain and the *Virginia Daily Union*. Twain himself admitted that he was upset because the Union had outbid him (as the representative of the *Enterprise*) while he was away from the flour sack auction temporarily; this could be the motive behind Twain’s unsigned accusation that the Union’s employees had reneged on their pledge. Certainly the ensuing exchange of Twain’s challenges to duel and the refusal by J.L. Laird and J.W. Wilmington to do so was brimming with personal emotion, and Twain was unquestionably ill-advised to publish it.

**A Shaky Stand Against Corruption**

Mark Twain paid lip service to standing against corruption, but as was shown in Chapter 5, his claims that he was motivated by principle are not entirely convincing. He called the “Bloody Massacre” hoax a means of exposing malfeasance by the Spring Valley Water Company, yet he was aware of the possibility that his mention of the company, buried at the end of the item, would be deleted by papers that picked up the story and the probability that many readers, overcome by the graphic descriptions of the “crime,” would never reach the more mundane details at the end.

Twain’s arguments in favor of moving the capital from Carson City to Virginia City—on the grounds that proximity to the press would force honesty upon the government—also fail to stand up. The assertion that the press cannot keep an eye on state government from a distance of sixteen miles is
contradicted by the coverage provided by the Daily Union as well as by his own correspondence in the Enterprise; the implication that there is no local paper in Carson City is blatantly false and amounts to an insult to the Carson City Independent. Twain's disrespect of that paper is on record; he had, after all, attacked the Independent three days earlier as being ineffectual, even ignorant of its duty of exposing price-gouging by an undertaker. (His self-righteous claim that he had exposed the Spring Valley Water Company's fraud is shaky.) Twain's real reason for advocating a new site for the capital is unknown, but taking a stand against corruption does not seem to be his motivation.

Nor was serving the public his motivation in claiming that money intended for the Sanitary Commission was to be diverted to a miscegenation society. According to a letter to his sister-in-law, Mollie, Twain wrote that editorial while he was drunk and in fact was dissuaded by Dan De Quille from putting it in the paper; it ran accidentally when a printer mistook it for copy that was intended for publication (Smith 190). Thus, on the basis of his Enterprise work that is available at the present time, Mark Twain can hardly be called a zealous reformer.

**Twain's Abuse of the Freedom of Speech**

Twain cannot be praised for his judicious exercise of the right of free speech, either. It is clear from the Gold Hill Daily News's reaction on May 24, 1864, to the Sanitary
Fund controversy—a mixture of bemusement and disgust ("Horrible! most horrible!")—that even in the rambunctious Nevada mining country, airing one's personal grudges was not considered a responsible exercise of the right of free speech. The Virginia Daily Union, too, had expressed its view early in the controversy that Mark Twain had crossed the line. As it said on May 21, 1864,

Never before . . . have we found an opponent in statement or in discussion who had no gentlemanly sense of professional propriety, who conveyed in every word, and in every purpose of all his words, such a groveling disregard for truth, decency and courtesy. . . .

In fact, it can be said that from the very beginning of his tenure on the Territorial Enterprise, Mark Twain had abused the right of free speech, by speaking just a little too freely. As Ralph Langer, executive editor of The Dallas Morning News, puts it, a newspaper has an obligation to its readers to be honest with them; it "carries on a conversation with readers" in which it must develop trust and credibility. Humor writing and satire have a place in newspapers, Langer says—as long as readers clearly understand that what they are reading is humor or satire. Such is the problem with writing hoaxes, says Langer, who believes they should never appear in the paper: A hoax is too easily misunderstood as being truth.¹ In publishing a hoax, a newspaper and the
reporter who wrote it both run a serious risk of damaging their credibility. Mark Twain keenly felt the consequences of his “Bloody Massacre” hoax, enduring demands from papers that had been taken in that he resign before they would believe another word the Enterprise printed; according to Dan De Quille, the negative reaction worried Twain tremendously—an implicit acknowledgment that he had harmed himself and the Enterprise. The “Petrified Man,” although the reaction was not so outspoken, was also widely believed. In both cases, because of his failure to let people in on the joke (despite the clues he planted), Twain broke faith with readers and damaged his credibility as well as the newspaper’s.

The Need for Restraint

The bulk of what is known of Mark Twain’s work at the Territorial Enterprise is harmless enough; although chances are that little of it would be likely to make its way into a mainstream newspaper (as the Enterprise was) if it were written today, most of his writing at the Enterprise was acceptable according to the standards that prevailed in and around Virginia City. His legislative reporting seems to have been accurate, and his asides show that he could be a wry observer of government at work; his correspondence and local columns exemplify the wit for which he would soon become famous. The writers at the Enterprise obviously were not held responsible for sticking strictly to the truth, nor did the Enterprise or its competitors make any claims to be rigidly
objective in their reporting, although opinion seems to have been more overtly displayed in the Enterprise than, say, the Virginia Daily Union. (The "duty, aim and privilege" of the Gold Hill Daily News did not include putting "a blind on our own opinions." But even given the latitude that the Enterprise offered him, Mark Twain could not help stepping outside the bounds of accepted practice.

The restraining influence that Livy Clemens and William Dean Howells would later exercise over Mark Twain was nowhere to be found among his colleagues in Virginia City, and he was apparently unable to exercise this type of restraint himself. Dan De Quille, himself a writer of tall tales and hoaxes, evidently was not a steadying influence. He is on record in only one instance as having tried to save Mark Twain from himself, when he talked the drunken Twain out of printing his miscegenation society allegations against the ladies of Carson City (although the item ultimately ran anyway). Nor was Enterprise editor Joe Goodman inclined to rein in the rambunctious Twain; in fact, in an Enterprise item, Goodman celebrated Twain as

Monarch of Mining Items, Detailer of Events, Prince of Platitudes, Chief of Biographers, Expounder of Unwritten Laws, Puffer of Wildcat, Profaner of Divinity, Detractor of Merit, Flatterer of Power, Recorder of Stage Arrivals, Pack Trains, Hay Wagons and Things in General. (Territorial Enterprise, May
3, 1863, quoted in Paul Fatout, *Mark Twain in Virginia City*, 44)\(^3\)

It should also be noted that, if Albert Bigelow Paine’s information is correct, Goodman refused Twain’s implicit offer to resign in the wake of the “Bloody Massacre” furor (*Biography* 230-31).

Later on, Twain would be more able to rely on those close to him to protect him from himself; his readiness to heed the suggestions of his wife and of William Dean Howells indicates that he had come to believe he needed such advice. Livy Clemens, as Paine describes it, served as Twain’s conscience, or as his “public,” preventing him from publishing what could become literary disasters.

Mark Twain was likely to write not wisely but too much, piling up hundreds of manuscript pages only because his brain was thronging as with a myriad of fireflies, a swarm of darting, flashing ideas demanding release. As often as not he began writing with only a nebulous idea of what he proposed to do. He would start with a few characters and situations, trusting in Providence to supply material as needed. So he was likely to run ashore any time. As for those other attempts . . . he was just as apt to begin those as the better sort, for somehow he could never tell the difference. (560)
Livy's role was as judge of what was acceptable, and Twain accepted her pronouncements. Of his Autobiography of a Damn Fool, for instance, Paine quotes Twain as saying, "Livy wouldn't have it, so I gave it up" (561). Paine cites other instances as well of Livy's influence over Twain's creations. In his view, in fact, "it would have been better had she exercised her editorial prerogative even more actively," an opinion that critics do not universally share (562).

Justin Kaplan, in Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain, asserts that Twain was "impatient . . . throughout his career to submit his work to someone else's judgment, follow recommendations, be confirmed and approved" (73). Had this been true of his work at the Enterprise, Twain might have avoided the problems he created for himself. In any case, in later times Mary Fairbanks, Bret Harte, and eventually Livy and Howells served this editorial function (73). Kaplan cites, among other instances, Livy's influence on the ending of The Gilded Age (161); Howells's influence on swaying Twain toward the idea that Tom Sawyer "is not a boy's book, at all" (180), as well as Twain's accession to all Howells's suggested changes in the book (192)⁴; and the success of both Livy and Howells in restraining Twain's impulses to castigate the Concord Public Library for banning Huckleberry Finn (269-70). Howells summed up Twain's compliance this way: "If you wanted a thing changed, very good, you changed it. His proof
sheets came back each a veritable ‘mush of concession’” (Kaplan 73).

But such restraining influences lay in the future; in Virginia City, Mark Twain had no such concerned critics to keep his recklessness in check. The lack of judgment exhibited in his hoaxes, the questionable motives that underlie several of his Enterprise pieces, and his failure to keep personal factors from tainting his work weigh heavily against Mark Twain’s credibility as a newspaper journalist. His attempts to justify his pieces by citing legitimate journalistic concerns when personal prejudices played important roles in their composition amount to deception that cannot be overlooked. These attempts at justification indicate that Twain was not naively unaware that his motives violated tenets of acceptable journalism, even in rough-and-tumble frontier Nevada. Ultimately, Mark Twain must be judged to have failed as a reporter at the Territorial Enterprise.

Later in his career, he would construct works whose surfaces hid deeper significances: In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Twain would write a picaresque tale of river life that subtly commented on race relations and intrinsic human worth; in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, he would use a novel that Howells called “charming, original, wonderful—good in fancy, and sound to the core in morals” to unleash his feelings concerning the futility of what humanity sees as progress, thoughts that could only be expressed by what Twain
called "a pen warmed up in hell" (Kaplan 301). But at this stage of his life, with regional notoriety rather than nationwide fame, Twain was composing works that claimed journalistic significance for themselves but whose surfaces actually concealed the petty, shallow personal concerns underneath.

It is fortunate that he eventually found success as a writer of fiction, a career in which he was not bound by the strictures imposed on a reporter, even the relatively loose strictures of the Enterprise; it is perhaps equally fortunate that he eventually found Olivia Langdon and William Dean Howells, two people who could rescue him from the misjudgments that clouded his tenure at the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise.
NOTES


2 The most notorious hoax of recent times was not written as a piece of humor but was intended to pass as serious reporting. The Washington Post, on September 28, 1980, ran a story that purported to describe the life of Jimmy, an eight-year-old drug addict. The story won a Pulitzer Prize for the Post and reporter Janet Cooke. Although the story contained several discrepancies that should have tipped off editors (and the Pulitzer committee), the fact that Jimmy did not exist was not discovered until questions arose concerning Cooke’s educational background. She confessed to the hoax and resigned from the paper, which returned the Pulitzer and apologized to readers in an editorial.

3 Goodman’s reference to Twain as “Recorder of Stage Arrivals, Pack Trains, [and] Hay Wagons” recalls Twain’s story in Roughing It that he had “found one wretched old hay truck dragging in from the country” and had multiplied it by sixteen, brought it into town from sixteen different directions, made sixteen separate items out of it, and got up such another sweat
about hay as Virginia City had never seen in the world before. (296-97)

The epithet "Chief of Biographers" may refer to a bogus biography by Twain of Virginia City Marshal Jack Perry, although Edgar M. Branch and Robert H. Hirst note in Early Tales & Sketches, Vol. 1, that Twain may have contributed a number of legitimate biographies to the Enterprise.

4 Kaplan notes:

When Clemens came to "the dreary and hateful task" of revising the manuscript, he hit upon a method which sums up the extent of his almost unquestioning reliance on Howells: "Instead of reading the MS, I simply hunted out the pencil marks and made the emendations which they suggested." (192-93)
CHRONOLOGY

This chronology of events during Mark Twain’s tenure at the Virginia City **Territorial Enterprise** is a compilation of information from Edgar M. Branch and Robert H. Hirst’s *The Works of Mark Twain: Early Tales and Sketches, Volume 1, 1851-1864*, Paul Fatout’s *Mark Twain in Virginia City*, and Henry Nash Smith’s *Mark Twain of the Enterprise*.

1862

July 30: Letter to Orion indicates Clemens has received an offer from the **Territorial Enterprise**.

August 7: Letter to Orion indicates he has accepted the **Enterprise**’s offer.

Late September: Sam Clemens reports for work at the **Enterprise**.

October 1: First writings attributed to Sam Clemens in the **Territorial Enterprise**: *A Gale, The Indian Troubles on the Overland Route, [More Indian Troubles]*.

October 4: First item known to have been written by Clemens: the Petrified Man hoax.

November 11–December 20: Second Territorial Legislature in session; Clemens covers it for the **Enterprise**.

December 27: Dan De Quille leaves Virginia City for an extended visit to his family in Iowa.
1863

January 29: Clemens takes the 5 a.m. stage from Virginia to Carson for a week’s stay there.

February 3: First appearance of an article to which Clemens signs the name Mark Twain.

February 6: Clemens returns to Virginia City.

May 2: Clemens takes a leave of absence from his job at the Enterprise and travels to San Francisco with Clement T. Rice of the Virginia Daily Union for a two-month stay.

July 2: Clemens returns to Virginia City and resumes his position as local editor of the Enterprise.

July 26: Fire destroys the White House, where Clemens rooms, thrusting him into a “bankrupt community.”

August 2: While Clemens is laid up in bed with a cold, Rice publishes an “APOLOGETIC” under Mark Twain’s name. Twain repudiates it in the August 4 Enterprise.

August 17: Having failed to cure his cold during a two-week visit to Lake Tahoe, Clemens travels to Steamboat Springs for a six-day stay at the Steamboat Springs Hotel.

September 5: Still suffering from his cold, Clemens travels to San Francisco, hoping to cure it there. While in San Francisco, Clemens writes “HOW TO CURE A COLD,” attends the Lick House Ball, and sees Adah Isaacs Menken perform in Mazeppa. Meanwhile, Dan De Quille returns to Virginia City.
October 28: Back in Virginia City, Mark Twain publishes “A Bloody Massacre Near Carson.”

October 29: “I TAKE IT ALL BACK.”

November 2-December 11: In Carson City, Samuel Clemens reports the Constitutional Convention; Mark Twain comments on it.

December 18-29: Artemus Ward visits Virginia City, parties with the Enterprise staff.

1864

January 12-February 20: Clemens covers the third Territorial Legislature in Carson City; Twain comments on it.

April 20: In Austin, Nevada, Ruel C. Gridley repeatedly auctions off a sack of flour for the benefit of the Sanitary Fund, bringing in $5,335. (For a more detailed account of this and subsequent events, see Chapter 5.)

May 5: The Sanitary Commission of Ormsby County sponsors a fancy dress ball in Carson City. Two weeks later, Mark Twain suggests in an editorial that the proceeds may be headed for a miscegenation society rather than for the benefit of sick and wounded soldiers.

May 15-16: Gridley’s flour sack is auctioned in Gold Hill, Virginia City, and other area towns for a total take of about $30,000.

May 18: Twain publishes an editorial accusing employees of the rival Virginia Daily Union of reneging on the pledge they made during the Sanitary Fund flour sack auction.
This editorial results in an exchange of letters in which Twain challenges the *Union*’s editor to a duel. The resulting furor, combined with the fallout from Twain’s accusation that Sanitary Fund charity ball receipts were to be sent to a miscegenation society, cause Twain to consider leaving town.

May 29: Mark Twain and his friend and colleague Steve Gillis leave for San Francisco by stagecoach, ending their employment at the *Territorial Enterprise*. 
APPENDIX B

ILLUSTRATIONS
REFERENCES


Territorial Enterprise. Virginia City, Nevada. Dates as cited in text.