

by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

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**"It's far better the legislature meet every sixty years for two days than every two years for sixty days." This hilarious quip makes the rounds seemingly every legislative session in Nevada.** Samuel Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain, not surprisingly, is generally credited for the humorous quote (and not cowboy humorist Will Rogers or former New York Yankee Yogi Berra who get credit for virtually everything Twain doesn't). A Reno newspaper editor asked me if Twain, who lived in Nevada Territory and covered two legislative sessions for Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise*, actually authored the witty saying.

Persons familiar with Samuel Clemen's career in Nevada contacted by telephone and e-mail, including biographer Margaret Sanborn and Mark Twain Papers staff at the University of California's Bancroft Library, had never heard of the quote. "None of them knew the quote," wrote doctoral candidate Louis Suarez referring to the senior editors of the Mark Twain Papers, "and all of them thought it very clever indeed." Twain aficionados, writer and reporter Jon Christensen and journalist Professor "Jake" Highton of the University of Nevada, Reno, said that if he didn't say it, he would have!

Be that as it may, an exhaustive search of Twain's extant writings, including *Roughing It* (1872), failed to uncover the quote about Nevada's legislature. There is no record of saying the quote while "Governor" of the "Third House," a body created to lampoon and satirize the 1861, 1862 and 1864 territorial sessions and the first Constitutional Convention in 1863. Someone else may have made the pithy observation, but if there is another author, then he or she remains unknown.

The irony in attributing the quote to Mark Twain is that when the young reporter was covering the sessions, the territorial assemblage was meeting about once a year and not every two years. Referring to the 1864 Territorial Legislature in *Roughing It*, he remarked "there was no longer satisfying variety in going down to Carson to report on the proceedings of the legislature once a year...." The biennial sessions began in 1867 almost three years after Twain left Nevada for California.

However, Twain had choice things to say about legislatures. In an address entitled, "Americans and the English," delivered on July 4, 1872 after leaving Nevada and California forever and taking up residence in Hartford, Connecticut, he said: "I think I can say, and say with pride, that we have some legislatures that bring higher prices than any in the world." There are persons who agree with Twain and argue little has changed.

Photo: *Gold Hill Daily News*, February 11, 1864

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