by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

The masthead on Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg's inaugural version of the *Territorial Enterprise* on May 2, 1952 claimed the famous publication was "Nevada's First Newspaper." When they resurrected the newspaper, the two colorful bon vivants and raconteurs probably believed it to be true. After all, Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881) claimed the newspaper was "the pioneer paper of the Territory." Everyone seemingly wants a first and so did Beebe and Clegg in their efforts to hype Virginia City and the Comstock in the 1950s. However it's not true. Let me tell you why.

The first edition of the *Territorial Enterprise* was printed in Genoa, Utah Territory, on December 18, 1858. The pioneer newspaper and its printing press then moved to Carson City where it first

appeared on November 26, 1859. One year later the
Enterprise
found a permanent home in Virginia City, Utah Territory, where the paper resumed publication on November 3, 1860.

By late 1862, the fledgling newspaper, now published in Nevada Territory, included among its reporters William Wright and Samuel Clemens. The editor was Joseph Goodman who had hired both gifted writers. Wright had adopted the pen name "Dan DeQuille" in California prior to his coming to the Comstock in 1860. Clemens took the pen name "Mark Twain" in January 1863 while working for the *Enterprise*.

The key element in this story is that the *Territorial Enterprise* was the first newspaper to be PRINTED in the area that became Nevada. We now know there were two handwritten newspapers that preceded the
Enterprise.

Nevada's first newspaper was actually the *Gold-Canon Switch* produced about 1854 in the fledgling mining camp of Johntown. Walter Cosser, who first arrived at Spofford Hall's Station at the mouth of Gold Canyon in 1852, is credited with founding the Johntown settlement in late 1853 when he opened a store a few miles up the canyon. Precious little is known of the
Gold-Canon Switch
. Dan DeQuille, in
The Big Bonanza
(1876), characterized the newspaper as a "spicy weekly" composed of "several sheets" of foolscap and "assiduously passed from hand to hand." The editor was Joseph Webb who was among the first to locate claims on the Comstock in 1859. No issues of the paper are known to exist.

Stephen Kinsey
1828-1903