



*Handwritten Newspapers
of Early Nevada
1854 - 1908*

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In 2007, it took three hours to transform a sheet of paper into news and art, according to journalist Scott Carney, who described on wired.com the world's last handwritten newspaper, *The Musalman* of Chennai, India.

Approximately a century and a half earlier, between 1854 and 1861, in the area that later became the state of Nevada, four handwritten newspapers were issued, but unlike the daily *Musalman*, which is reproduced by offset lithography from master pages hand-penned by a staff of calligraphers with quills and ink, the *Gold Canyon Switch*, *Scorpion*, *East of the Nevada* and *Nix Cum Rouscht* were produced in pencil in extremely limited editions or, perhaps, as single copy editions, and a century earlier, in 1908, the last Nevada holographic newspaper, the *Granite Times*, was penciled in and sold for \$5 per copy!

Although there are no known copies of the four earlier handwritten newspapers, information about some of them may be gleaned from later journals and histories while three Nevada newspaper bibliographies (Fokes, 1964; Lingenfelter, 1964; and Lingenfelter and Gash, 1984) offer little more than conjecture regarding details of the frequency and duration of these unique journals.

Gold Canyon Switch

The *Gold Canyon Switch*, the first of five handwritten newspapers published in the area that became Nevada, appeared in Johntown, a gold camp near the area that was later named the Comstock Lode, and in his classic history of the Lode, *The Big Bonanza*, Dan DeQuille (1877, p. 11) noted the *Switch*, edited by Joe Webb, was a "spicy weekly" and was written on "several sheets" of foolscap and "assiduously passed from hand to hand."

Rocha (2010) says the "publication" was "probably issued monthly" but offers no reference. Folkes (1964) suggests, without authority, the paper was "issued periodically ... from 1854 to 1858, and Lingenfelter and Gash (1984) says it "was probably issued monthly" and imply it succumbed in its maiden year, 1854.

Scorpion

Bibliographical information and editorial content of one edition of Nevada's second hand-written newspaper, the *Scorpion*, is found in an "exchange" published in the April 12, 1871 edition of Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise*: "A Curiosity. We have been furnished ... a copy of the *Scorpion*, a newspaper published in manuscript at the town of Genoa in 1857. The paper is published (written) in a large bold hand writing and is Volume 2, No. 6 ... It is dated Genoa, Carson Valley, U.T., July 1, 1857."

DeQuille (1877, p. 11) says the *Scorpion* was a weekly, but the volume and number of the issue referred to in the *Enterprise* makes it highly unlikely the paper survived well into the second volume, assuming the term "volume" implies a full year of publication. Lingenfelter (1964, p. 47) says "The *Scorpion* was published monthly," and speculates that it "probably died before its twelfth number," while Folkes (1964, p. 34) says, without authority, the paper lasted from 1856 to 1858. Lingenfelter and Gash (1984, p. 89) duplicate Lingenfelter (1964).

The *Enterprise* described in considerable detail the contents of the *Scorpion*:

"... The editorial column contains the following notice: 'The *Scorpion* is published monthly at Genoa, in Carson Valley, and edited by S.A.K. (Stephen A. Kinsey). It will contain a full and extensive digest of all the current news and discussions of the day. It will be more especially made up to suit Carson Valley, containing a great variety amount of matter, particularly interesting to our patrons, and nothing which can interest the general reader will be omitted.'

"In the second column are two profiles — one of them the man who joined the Sons of Temperance, and the other, who did not. Our readers can judge of their appearance. Another item says: 'Hail storms in July is (*sic*) a common occurrence in Carson Valley this year.'

"The next item shows that even in 1857 the few Americans isolated in the valley did not forget the coming anniversary of our national Independence, for a local item says: 'The Eighty-first Anniversary — There will be a grand ball at Lucky Bill's Hotel on Monday evening, July 5th. Gents and ladies of the valley will enjoy this night at the July ball.'

"The next item will give the new residents some idea how the old timers rejoiced over the arrival of a pack train. It says: 'Wm. Nixon has just received a large assortment of new goods via Big Tree road. Smith & Ormsby's (killed in the Indian War of 1860 near Pyramid Lake) large stock of goods is expected daily. Up to the hour of going to press, we learned they had arrived in Lake Valley. Singleton's pack mules leave tomorrow for Placerville.'

"Another: 'Trains are daily arriving with horses, mules and cattle.'

"Killed by the Indians — 'It is reported that a party of prospectors from California were (*sic*) killed by the Indians on Walker River.'

"The most singular item is this: 'Chinese have commenced work at Gold Canyon.'

"The poet column is also worthy of notice...

'I sat me down in thought profound,
This maxim wise I drew:
It's easier for to like a girl
Than make a girl like you.'

"The comic column also contains the following: 'Rumor says there is a man in this town whose nose is so long that he is unable to hear himself sneeze.'

"Another: 'Stage line to Placerville will leave Carson Valley every Thursday. Returning, will leave Placerville every Monday, with the United States mail and Tracy's Express. Stage fare from Carson to Placerville, nothing; from Placerville to Carson Valley, half price.'

"The editor says, 'The Scorpion commences the sixth number of this popular paper. The next issue will contain articles from Henry Ward Beecher, Fanny Fern, Charles Dickens, Longfellow, Dow Jr., etc., etc.'

"The paper contains many articles for which we have not space. Parties desiring to see this old curiosity will find it at Perry & Irwin's for a few day."

The *Switch* and *Scorpion* have recently been pawns in the pursuit of antiquarianism, as illustrated in a feature story by Nevada historian Guy Rocha (2010). Rocha challenges a decades-old contention that Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise* was the first newspaper to be "printed" in the area that became Nevada and supports his premise by discussing the earlier publication of the handwritten journals.

East of the Nevada or the Miner's Voice from the Colorado

Silver mining activity in southern Nevada prompted publication of the state's third holographic journal. The 1861-era mining town of Potosi, 25 miles southwest of modern Las Vegas, was established by the Colorado Mining Co. and among the miners and entrepreneurs who rushed to the excitement was J.A. Talbott, a printer from California. On February 19, 1861, he founded the *East of the Nevada or the Miner's Voice from the Colorado*, according to an account in the *Los Angeles Star* of March 9, 1861.

"Talbot to the rescue!," the *Star* headlined, "Once more the pen of friend Talbot is wielded to enlighten the world of California as to the wonderful mineral resources of his new El Dorado, the already famous silver mines of Potosi, near the Colorado River. From that city we have received a copy of another paper — truly, of making many papers, there is no end — entitled 'East of the Nevada; or, the Miner's Voice from the Colorado,' Vol. 1, No. 1; Potosi, February 19th, 1861.

"The Miner's Voice — like the Nix, above referred to — is a manuscript, which Mr. Talbot has prepared in newspaper style, and filled with first-rate items, for our sole use. We thank our friend for the care he has taken in this matter, and have great pleasure in transferring the utterings of the Voice to our columns."

Lingenfelter and Gash (1984, p. 171) conjecture the sheet "probably ran for no more than a few issues."

Potosi Nix Cum Rouscht

Within a very short time the president of the Colorado Mining Co., J.E. Stevens, founded the state's fourth holographic newspaper, the *Potosi Nix Cum Rouscht*, and it, too, was described in the *Los Angeles Star* of March 9, 1861:

"From the city of Potosi we have received No. 1, Vol. 1, of a semi-occasional paper, 'The Potosi Nix Cum Rouscht,' edited by the 'Man about the Mill;' although 'printed' at the Vegas, was published at Potosi, and circulated here in Los Angeles. From its ably written 'local' columns, we make the following extracts. We may observe that the 'Man about the Mill' is our friend Capt. J.E. Stevens, formerly of Marysville, President of the Colorado Mining Company, whom we had the pleasure of meeting this week, accompanied by Mr. Cooper, the Secretary of the Company."

No date was given for the issue described and Lingenfelter and Gash (p, 171) conjecture the enterprise "probably lasted one issue...."

Granite Times

Granite, a small gold mining camp several miles northwest of Schurz, Nevada, was the home of Nevada's most recent manuscript newspaper and the only one with surviving editions.

For all of the 1908 camp's unpretentiousness, it has been immortalized by the efforts of F. Eugene Bugbee, editor and publisher of the *Granite Times*, a manuscript newspaper "Devoted to the Mining and Material Interests of Granite and the Mountain View District." Little is known of Bugbee save for three issues of his little newspaper, two of which (April 17, 1908, Vol. I, No. 5 and May 1, 1908, Vol. 1, No. 7) are preserved on microfilm at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at the Nevada Historical Society, Reno, and a third issue (April 3, 1908, Vol. 1, No. 3) described in the *Rawhide Rustler* of April 18, 1908. The *Rawhide Rustler*, a short-lived conventional newspaper published at the gold camp of Rawhide, 38 miles northeast of Hawthorne, noted, "We reproduce above a section of the *Times* a paper printed in lead pencil in the new town of Granite...."

Lingenfelter (1964, p. 131) refers to the publication as the *Granite News*; one can only wonder why the bibliographer didn't look at the only surviving copies of these special Nevada treasures considering he noted in his bibliography their preservation in microform!

Contents of the two surviving editions range from mining news to politics and include stories on single jack mining, the possibility of cheaper water coming to Granite, an editorial admonishment not to "argue politics on the street" and editorial endorsement of William Jennings Bryan for president.

Reproductions of *Granite Times* pages appear in Basso (1981, pp. 17-24) and are also available as jpg files from the email address on page 1.

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