

Virginia City Territorial Enterprise
February 9, 1864

Letter from Carson City

Concerning Notaries

A strange, strange thing occurred here yesterday, to wit:
A MAN APPLIED FOR A NOTARY'S COMMISSION.

Think of it. Ponder over it. He wanted a notarial commission—he said so himself. He was from Storey County. He brought his little petition along with him. He brought it on two stages. It is voluminous. The county surveyor is chaining it off. Three shifts of clerks will be employed night and day on it, deciphering the signatures and testing their genuineness. They began unrolling the petition at noon, and people of strong mining proclivities at once commenced locating claims on it. We are too late, you know. But then they say the extensions are just as good as the original. I believe you.

Since writing the above, I have discovered that the foregoing does not amount to much as a sensation item, after all. The reason is because there are seventeen hundred and forty-two applications for notaryships already on file in the Governor's office. I was not aware of it, you know. There are also as much as eleven cords of petitions stacked up in his back yard. A watchman stands guard over this combustible material—the back yard is not insured.

Since writing the above, strange events have happened. I started downtown, and had not gone far, when I met a seedy, ornery, ratty, hangdog-looking stranger, who approached me in the most insinuating manner, and said he was glad to see me. He said he had often sighed for an opportunity of becoming acquainted with me—that he had read my effusions (he called them “effusions”) with solemn delight, and had yearned to meet the author face-to-face. He said he was Billson—Billson of Lander—I might have heard of him. I told him I had—many a time—which was an infamous falsehood. He said “D—n it, old Quill-driver you must come and take a drink with me”; and says I, “D—n it, old Vermin-ranch, I'll do it.” [I had him there.]

We took a drink, and he told the bar-keeper to charge it. After which, he opened a well-filled carpet-sack and took out a shirt-collar and a petition. He then threw the empty carpet-sack aside and unrolled several yards of the petition—“just for a starter,” he said. “Now,” says he, “Mark, have you got a good deal of influence with Governor?” “Unbounded,” says I, with honest pride; “when I go and use my influence with Governor Nye, and tell him it will be a great personal favor to me if he will do so and so, he always says it will be a real pleasure to him—that if it were any other man—any other man in the world—but seeing it's me, he won't.” Mr. Billson then remarked that I was the very man; he wanted a little notarial appointment, and he would like me to mention it to the governor. I said I would, and turned away, resolved to damn young Billson's official aspirations with a mild dose of my influence.

I walked about ten steps, and met a cordial man, with the dust of travel upon his garments. He mashed my hands in his, and as I stood straightening the joints back into their places again, says he, “Why darn it, Mark, how well you're looking! Thunder! It's been an age since I saw you. Turn around and let's look at you good. Gad, it's the same old Mark!

Well, how've you been—and what have you been doing with yourself lately? Why don't you never come down and see a fellow? Every time I come to town, the old woman's sure to get after me for not bringing you out, as soon as I get back. Why she takes them articles of your'n, and slathers 'em into her old scrap-book, along with deaths and marriages, and receipts for the itch, and the small-pox, and hell knows what all, and if it warn't that you talk too slow to ever make love, dang my cats if I wouldn't be jealous of you. But what's the use fooling away time here?—let's go and gobble a cocktail." This was old Boreas, from Washoe. I went and gobbled a cocktail with him. He mentioned incidentally that he wanted a notaryship, and showed me a good deal of his petition. I said I would use my influence in his behalf, and requested him to call at the governor's office in the morning, and get his commission. He thanked me most heartily, and said he would. [I think I see him doing it.]

I met another stranger before I got to the corner—a pompous little man with a crooked-handled cane and sorrel moustache. Says he, "How do you do, Mr. Twain—how do you do, sir? I am happy to see you, sir—very happy indeed, sir. My name is _____ . Pardon me, sir, but I perceive you do not entirely recollect me—I am J. Bidlecome Dusenberry, of Esmeralda, formerly of the city of New York, sir." "Well," says I, "I'm glad to meet you, Dysentery, and—" "No, no Dusenberry, sir, Dusenberry!—you—" "Oh, I beg your pardon," says I; "Dusenberry—yes, I understand, now; but it's all the same, you know—Dusenberry, by any other name would—however, I see you have a bale of dry goods—for me, perhaps." He said it was only a little petition, and proceeded to show me a few acres of it, observing casually that he was the candidate in the notarial line—that he had read my lucubrations (he called it all that) with absorbing interest, and he would like me to use my influence with the governor in his behalf. I assured him his commission would be ready for him as soon as it was signed. He appeared overcome with gratitude, and insisted, and insisted, and insisted, until at last I went and took a drink with him.

On the next corner I met Chief Justice Turner, on his way to the governor's office with a petition. He said, "God bless you, my dear fellow—I'm delighted to see you—" and hurried on, after receiving my solemn promise that he should be a Notary Public if I could secure his appointment. Next I met William Stewart, grinning in his engaging way, and stroking his prodigious whiskers from his nose to his stomach. Sandy Baldwin was with him, and they both had measureless petitions on a dray with the names all signed in their own handwriting. I knew those fellows pretty well and I didn't promise them my influence. I knew if the governor refused to appoint them, they would have an injunction on him in less than twenty-four hours, and stop the issuance of any more notary commissions. I met John B. Winters, next, and Judge North, and Mayor Arick, and Washoe Jim, and John O. Earl, and Ah Foo, and John H. Atchinson, and Hong Wo, and Wells Fargo, and Charley Strong, and Bob Morrow, and Gen. Williams, and seventy-two other prominent citizens of Storey County, with a long pack-train laden with their several petitions. I examined their documents, and promised to use my influence toward procuring notaryships for the whole tribe. I also drank with them.

I wandered down the street, conversing with every man I met, examining his petition. It became a sort of monomania with me, and I kept it up for two hours with unflagging interest. Finally, I stumbled upon a pensive, travel-worn stranger, leaning against an awning-post. I went up and looked at him. He looked at me. I looked at him again, and again he looked at me. I bent my gaze upon him once more, and says I, "Well?" He looked at me very hard, and says he, "Well—" "Well what?" says I, "Well I would like to examine your petition, if you please."

He looked very much astonished—I may say amazed. When he had recovered his presence of mind, he says "What the devil do you mean?" I explained to him that I only wanted to glance over his petition for a notaryship. He said he believed I was a lunatic—he

didn't like the unhealthy light in my eye, and he didn't want me to come any closer to him. I asked him if he had escaped the epidemic, and he shuddered and said he didn't know of any epidemic. I pointed to the large placard on the wall: "Coaches will leave the Ormsby House punctually every fifteen minutes, for the governor's mansion, for the accommodation of Notarial aspirants, etc., etc.—Schemerhorn, Agent"—and I asked him if he didn't know enough to understand what that meant? I also pointed to the long procession of petition-laden citizens filing up the street toward the governor's house, and asked him if he was not aware that all those fellows were going after notarial commissions—that the balance of the people had already gone, and that he and I had the whole town to ourselves?

He was astonished again. Then he placed his hand upon his heart, and swore a frightful oath that he had just arrived from over the mountains, and had no petition, and didn't want a notaryship. I gazed upon him a moment in silent rapture, and then clasped him to my breast. After which, I told him it was my turn to treat, by thunder. Whereupon, we entered a deserted saloon, and drank up its contents. We lay upon a billiard table in a torpid condition for many minutes, but at last my exile rose up and muttered in a sepulchral voice, "I feel it—O Heavens, I feel it in me veins!" "Feel what?" says I, alarmed. Says he, "I feel—O me sainted mother!—I feel—feel—a hankering to be a Notary Public!" And he tore down several yards of wall-paper, and fell to writing a petition on it. Poor devil—he had got it at last, and got it bad. I was seized with the fatal distemper a moment afterward. I wrote a petition with frantic haste, appended a copy of the Directory of Nevada Territory to it, and we fled down the deserted streets to the governor's office.

But I must draw the curtain upon these harrowing scenes—the memory of them scorches my brain. Ah, this legislature has much to answer for in cutting down the number of Notaries Public in this territory, with their infernal new law.

(Source: Twainquotes.com, <http://twainquotes.com/18640209bt.html>)