

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Drake's Plate

T. Fred Bagshaw, Assistant Director of Public Works in Sacramento, was another clever person who thought to send an unusual Christmas card to his friends. Or maybe it was Mrs. Bagshaw who had the original idea that a miniature of Sir Francis Drake's "Plate of Brass" would make a most attractive greeting card. In addition to this interesting historical item the couple sent an enclosure, attractively printed in color, of Robert Louis Stevenson's "An Evening Prayer," signed also by their young daughter. The family make their home in Mill Valley and are well known on the Monterey Peninsula.

Claude Faw of Carmel was kind enough to loan us his copy of the Christmas greeting that we might tell our readers about it. On the cover of the folder there is a drawing of the "Golden Hinde" and the title "In the name of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth of England" and the date, June 17, 1579.

Within the folder there is another drawing of Sir Francis Drake and his company planting the flag of his country and taking possession of California for "Her Majesty." Below this is a bit of California history, and then the "Plate of Brass," an exact copy of the original, pressed into a sheet of brass color paper in the same crude manner of the original. Even the worn irregular hole is in the right-hand corner.

On June 17, 1579, before the pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts or the colonists founded the village of Jamestown in Virginia, the great English navigator Francis Drake landed on the shores of California, his ship the "Golden Hinde" anchored in a "Faire and Good Baye," now known as Drake's Bay. It is located just a few miles north of San Francisco, in Marin County, described in written accounts as "a goodly country and fruitful soyle, stored with many blessings fit for the use of man."

Francis Drake took possession of the land in the name of the reigning Queen Elizabeth. He did so by nailing a plate of brass on a "faire great poste" which was sealed with a silver sixpence of the day, bearing a likeness of his queen.

In the summer of 1936, over 357 years later, the plate was found on a hillside in Marin County, California. After thorough examination and exhaustive tests at

Columbia University, it was scientifically authenticated as the genuine Drake Plate of Brass. The plate is now in possession of the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

Stevenson's Evening Prayer follows:

Lord receive our supplications for this house, family, and country. Protect the innocent, restrain the greedy, and the treacherous, lead us out of tribulation into quiet land. Look down upon ourselves and upon our absent ones. Help us and them; give us health, food, bright weather, and light hearts. In what we meditate of evil, frustrate our will; in what of good, further our endeavors, cause injuries to be forgot and benefits to be remembered. Let us lie down without fear and awake and arise with exultation. For his sake, in whose word we now conclude. Amen.