

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 13, 1961

### **A Birthday Document**

Humane interest is one of the greatest qualities one can possess, even when it comes to giving your birthday away to a child whose own birthday falls on Christmas Day. What a tragedy to a small boy or girl not to have two such beautiful, sentimental days to enjoy!

Robert Louis Stevenson, the famous author of "Old Pacific Capital", "Child's Garden of Verses", and other famous writings, once gave his birthday to a little girl who was born on Christmas Day. The original document is on display in the Stevenson House, along with a picture of the beautiful young lady who received the gift.

The document is quite legal - to the best of Stevenson's ability - and was sent direct to the young lady's father, H. C. Ide, a resident of Vermont.

It is dated June 18, 1891.

The document reads:

Dear Mr. Ide - Herewith please find the document, which I trust will prove sufficient in law. It seems to me very attractive in its eclecticism: Scots, English, and Roman law phrases are all indifferently introduced, and a quotation from the works of Haynes Bayly can hardly fail to attract the indulgence of the bench. Yours very truly, Robert Louis Stevenson.

"I, Robert Louis Stevenson, advocate of the Scots bar, author of the Master of the Ballantrae and moral emblems, stuck Civil Engineer, sole owner and Patentee of the place and plantation known as Vailima, in the Island of Upolu, Samoa, a British subject, being in sound mind, and pretty well, thank you, in body:

"In consideration that Miss Annie H. Ide, daughter of H. C. Ide in the town of Saint Johnsbury, in the County of Caledonia, in the State of Vermont, in the United States of America, was born, out of all reason, upon Christmas Day, and is therefore out of all justice denied the consolation and profit of a proper birthday;

"And considering that I, the said Robert Louis Stevenson, have attained an age when O, we never mention it, and that I have now no further use for a birthday of any description.

"Have transferred, and do hereby transfer, to the said Annie H. Ide, all and whole rights and privileges in the 13th day of November, formerly my birthday, now, hereby, and henceforth, the birthday of the said Annie H. Ide, to have, hold, exercise, and enjoy the same in the customary manner, by the sporting of fine raiment, eating of rich meats, and receipt of gifts, compliments, and copies of verse, according to the manner of our ancestors.

"And I direct the said Annie H. Ide to add the said name of Annie H. Ide the name of Louisa - at least in private; and charge her to use my said birthday with moderation and humanity, et Tamquam Bona Filia Familiae, the said birthday not being so young as it once was, and having carried me in a very satisfactory manner since I can remember.

"And in case the said Annie H. ide shall neglect or contravene either of the above conditions, I hereby revoke the donation and transfer my rights in the said birthday to the President of the United States for the time being;

"In witness wherefore I have hereto set my hand and seal this 10th day of June in the year of grace, 1891.

Seal

Robert Louis Stevenson, Witness, Lloyd Osburne  
Witness, Harold Watts

Dr. J. William MacLennan of Carmel has contributed an amusing bit concerning the family of Robert Louis Stevenson for this column today:

"Isabel Field, stepdaughter of Robert Louis Stevenson, once told me that there was difficulty between R.L.S. and his father, especially on religious subjects. The senior Stevenson was a strict Scotch Presbyterian; R.L.S. a liberal. In the elder Stevenson home on Sundays only the Bible and sermons were permitted to be read.

Fanny Stevenson managed to break this down when she and Louis were visiting his parents. His father was getting old, could read only a few minutes at a time, and enjoyed being read to. One Saturday evening Fanny read to him "Tom Sawyer" by Mark Twain. She stopped at a critical, very interesting place and hid the book.

Sunday afternoon she noticed her father-in-law was restless, turning up papers, and searching the bookcases. finally, he said to her, with a guilty smile, "Where's that book? I'd like to hear more about Tom." Fanny easily found the book and for the next hour the

old gentleman enjoyed the exploits of Tom. The following Sunday after church services he was riding with Huckleberry Finn on a raft down the Mississippi. Then followed the "Leather Stocking Tales" by James Fenimore Cooper, and Sundays became happier days in the Stevenson household.