

Testimonial Dinner for Judge Hilliard Comstock
September 14, 1964 - H. D. Bostock

Thank you Chairman Ray, our honored guests, Hilliard and Helen, other distinguished guests and friends.

I cannot begin to tell you how much it means to me - and how honored and privileged I feel tonight - to be back here in Santa Rosa with you once again - to share in the happiness of this occasion and to join with you in this inspiring community tribute - so highly deserved - this outpouring of warm affection - of honor and appreciation - for Hilliard Comstock - and also, of course, for the one who has been with him and at his side all during these many years - the one whose love and devotion - whose encouragement and understanding - I am sure - must always have been a source of quiet strength and inspiration to him in all that he has done.

As I was sitting here - I could not help but think what a deep feeling of happiness and what a rewarding sense of achievement must be his as he gazes out over the sea of faces in this great gathering - friends and associates from every walk of life - from every segment of the community - from every part of the county - from many surrounding areas and other parts of the State - for there - in your faces - in your eyes - and in your expressions - can be seen the true recognition and the true value of those many years of public and community service - the true satisfaction and recompense that comes from a job magnificently done and a life unselfishly lived - certainly your presence here speaks far more eloquently than could any words of ours from this platform tonight.

It was Abraham Lincoln who once said, "I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives and I also like to see him live in it so that his place is proud of him."

To which we can quickly and unhesitatingly add tonight - "Yes - and such a man is Hilliard Comstock" - because of no one could these simple but meaningful and all encompassing words more truly be spoken.

His has been a life that has been rich in service and dedicated in purpose; a life the breadth of vision and interest, the unselfishness, the devotion of which sets a standard for all to emulate; a life which has contributed so significantly and so importantly to the educational, the cultural and the civic advancement of Santa Rosa and Sonoma County in so many ways..

To try to recount for you in the few minutes that I have - the full story of this lifetime of service in community and civic life would not be possible - nor would it be necessary - because you have been a part of it - you have seen it unfold - you have lived it with him - and you have been a beneficiary of it.

But even so - I would not want to leave unexpressed the feeling of gratitude and appreciation that comes as one turns the pages of that story and recalls some of what is written there:

Back in 1920, Santa Rosa underwent a drastic change in its educational system. The outmoded Courthouse School District law was repealed and a new City Board of Education was appointed by the County Superintendent of Schools. Hilliard Comstock was elected President of the new board and a program of rapid expansion and building was undertaken. During the ensuing 9 years while Hilliard was board president, a new city charter provision, drafted by him, was adopted; twenty-eight elementary school districts were annexed to the high school district; the Junior College district was formed; new sites were purchased for the high school and the junior college and three city elementary schools; new buildings were erected for the High School, for Fremont, Lincoln, South Park and Burbank schools and a building program for the junior college was launched. Litigation and strikes plagued this period of expansion and a fire at the old high school on Humboldt Street caused all classes to be held for many months in public halls, in lodge rooms and in empty churches, but all these difficulties were successfully met and surmounted. In 1929, Hilliard resigned as president of the board when he was appointed Superior Court Judge.

Hilliard has always been very active in club and fraternal life. He was an organizer and first life member of the Santa Rosa Golf and Country Club - serving for many years as a director and for two separate terms as President of the club.

He was co-founder and charter member of Theodore Roosevelt Post No. 21 of the American Legion and has been honored by election to an honorary life membership in this veterans' organization.

In fraternal circles, he has long been affiliated with the Elks, the Odd Fellows and the Masonic lodges. The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry has honored him with its 33rd and highest degree, and he is a trustee of the Santa Rosa Scottish Rite Bodies as well as the personal representative therein of the Sovereign Grand Inspector General in California.

A Rotarian for 35 years, he is an honorary member of the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa.

For many years President of the Santa Rosa Foundation, Judge Comstock has been very active in the development of park and playground facilities in this city. The original Howarth playground on A Street and the present Howarth Park and Lake Ralphine Recreation Area were made possible through the administration of the Leonard Howarth Trust by this foundation with the splendid cooperation of the city officials of Santa Rosa. Other charitable trusts handled by the foundation have been the Larry Cook Trust, the Fred and Jessie Rosenberg Scholarship Trust and the depository trust for the collection of the original donations for the Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital.

In 1948, Hilliard was appointed by the Chamber of Commerce Hospital Committee to act as Chairman of the fund raising drive to secure the donations which made possible the Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital. Starting with a goal of \$315,000, the effort was a complete success and went "over the top" with a final net collection of approximately \$354,000, to which, of course, much more was added by the Sisters of St. Joseph's of Orange, for the establishment of this fine hospital - a hospital which has helped materially to put Santa Rosa in the front rank as a medical center and which was one of the first major developments in the Montgomery Village area of the city.

In 1963 the Judge acted as General Chairman of the first Congress for Community Progress held by the Chamber of Commerce in Santa Rosa.

In connection with his interest in military affairs and shooting sports, the Judge has held high office at both the state and national levels. He is a past president and honorary life member of the California State Rifle Association and in 1942 and 1943 he served as National President of the National Rifle Association of America, an organization which now has a membership of over 650,000 individuals and some 12,000 clubs, and in which he is now a lifetime member of the Executive Council and also Chairman of the Legislative Committee.

In this activity he has been a leader in the hunter safety training and the home firearms safety training programs sponsored on a nation-wide scale by the National Rifle Association.

As is known, he is a staunch supporter of the basic constitutional right of the law-abiding citizen to "Keep and bear arms" as guaranteed by the Second Amendment; but at the same time he is also a strong advocate of strict law enforcement and severe penalties for those who employ firearms for any criminal purpose. He believes that notwithstanding the development of highly destructive modern weapons, it is still necessary as a part of national preparedness and for the protection of our basic freedoms for the individual citizen to have the lawful right to possess - and the skill to use - the military weapon of the individual soldier as against the threat of war or insurrection. The National Rifle Association, with strong War Department support, has stood for these principles throughout a successful existence of nearly one hundred years, and its aims and objectives have received high praise from such loyal patriots and leaders as Theodore Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. I know how proud Hilliard is to have served with the many fine men who direct the destinies and the worthy programs of this splendid organization.

And so is it written - and much more besides -

What a wonderful record of accomplishment it is - what a splendid contribution to have made - what a truly rewarding sense of achievement must be his.

But there is something else - something of even greater significance - that I would not want to leave unsaid either - even if it does inject into my remarks a still more serious note - because to me - never has it been more meaningful - never has it been more important than it is today - it is a thread that runs all through this wide spectrum of Hilliard's activities - that is so strongly evident all throughout - it is the willingness to personally accept the challenges, the responsibilities and the obligations of citizenship - not just its privileges.

I do not have to tell you tonight - I am sure - that we are living in a momentous period of history - a time of great change - and whether we like it or not, we must face the sober truth that today - our civilization - our way of life is not only under constant attack - but it is fighting for its very existence.

There have been twenty-five civilizations before ours - and all have been destroyed.

It is not at all impossible that our present way of life too could be taken from us - that the freedoms, the liberties, the privileges, and the traditions which have become almost commonplace in our lives, may not exist in the lives of our grandchildren.

But civilizations are destroyed from within, and not from without.

And if our civilization is destroyed, it will not be because of socialism or communism - it will be destroyed because of the ignorance, the apathy and the unwillingness of men and women like you and me to assume their obligations and responsibilities as individuals in this turbulent and this realistic world. It will be destroyed because perhaps you and I - and others like us - may be unwilling to serve - or to serve enough - because in effect we may not be willing to really invest in our country by making our citizenship an active, living vibrant force - as Hilliard Comstock has done.

We cannot all be Hilliard Comstocks - but we can follow his example and we can all play our part - each in his own way and in his own place - each of us can - and each of us must - find his own personal challenge and his own personal response - especially in this critical time - because only by so doing will we fulfill our responsibilities as beneficiaries of this matchless free society that we enjoy - only by so doing will we protect and strengthen this great free enterprise system of ours and keep it strong and secure - only by so doing can we help preserve these rights, and freedoms and liberties that are our but which today are so much taken for granted by so many - only by so doing can we help safeguard our precious American way of life from crumbling within or attack without and insure that our children and their children and the generations that will follow will continue to enjoy the blessings of our heritage.

This is the kind of citizenship that has been steadfastly expressed and lived by the one we honor tonight - a man who in his simplicity, his integrity and his loyalty embodies the finest attributes and traditions of American democracy, an American in the truest and fullest sense of the term - a man whose friendly manner, whose kindly understanding, whose sincerity and personal modesty has endeared him to his host of friends and has won for him the respect and the confidence and the affection of all who know him - a man whose life is surely living testimony to those age-old truths in life - that to have a friend is to be a friend - that to give is to receive - that to lose oneself is to find oneself - and that to be happy is to serve - and in what else in life - after all is said and done - is there truly to be found greater satisfaction and happiness.

I join with all of you in wishing for Hilliard and Helen many happy and healthful years ahead in what I know will not be "retirement" - but rather instead - a life of expanded opportunities for continued usefulness and service - and a life of ever widening horizons and interests and satisfactions and friendships - just as it always has been.

Thank you very much.