

SPEECH FOR HIRAM BINGHAM IV AND “DISTINGUISHED
AMERICAN DIPLOMATS” FIRST-DAY-OF-ISSUE
CEREMONY MAY 30, 2006
WASHINGTON DC CONVENTION CENTER

By, Robert Kim Bingham, Sr.

GREETINGS. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I wish to thank the Chairman of the Postal Board, James Miller, and the US Postal Service for this supreme opportunity to share the podium with the families and friends of the six “Distinguished American Diplomats” being honored on commemorative stamps issued today.

In behalf of my family, I am delighted to say a few words about my father, Hiram Bingham IV, whom I knew and loved for 45 years.

Known as Harry to friends and family, he enjoyed stamp collecting, and would be proud to stand in the august company of our prominent diplomats featured today.

Though he resigned from the Foreign Service in 1946 and settled in his beloved hometown of Salem, Connecticut, he was always proud to receive mailings from the Foreign Service Association and to attend the receptions in Washington.

We are saluting him for his acts of courage while serving as a vice-consul in Marseilles during 1940-41, after the fall of France. In defiance of restrictive immigration policies, he saved not just famous persons on Hitler’s wanted list, but also many desperate ordinary refugees flooding Southern France.

There is evidence the Nazis complained to Washington, which was then neutral. Harry was transferred from Marseilles to Lisbon and

then to Buenos Aires where he was passed over for promotions and resigned in 1946, before his scheduled retirement.

We children now prize the “Constructive Dissent” award posthumously awarded jointly by Secretary of State Colin Powell and the Foreign Service Association in June 2002.

This was a welcome first-time government tribute to Harry, 14 years after he died in 1988 –and 60 years after his rescue efforts.

HARRY’S TRAITS. Harry was a gentle, religious man who would be embarrassed by all the attention he is receiving. He would only allow himself to brag about his wonderful wife, Rose, and their 11 children.

He was always looking for the best in people. Seeing a silver lining in every situation freed him from discouragement over setbacks.

Harry and Rose taught their children that there is a “spark of divinity” in every human being, and that all persons should be treated according to the Golden Rule.

The stamp campaign has been a thrilling seven-year journey, which attracted broad bipartisan support and riveting letters from survivors who eagerly participated.

A currently living survivor whom Harry saved, is an 80-year old California lady, who sent me the following emotional email last October:

Of the three [in] my family whom [your father] saved... I am the last one alive, and I write this with trembling fingers and many a tear.... Without him we would not have been able to avoid the concentration camp to which we were assigned two days later....

[Your father] provided us with [documents] because we no longer held citizenship in any country, and therefore had no papers....We cannot honor him enough.

I was thrilled to see my father's signatures on her attached documents, which I posted on the stamp-drive website at <http://pages.cthome.net/WWIIHERO/>.

I hope, by bringing out his story, with those of today's distinguished American envoys, we as a society can further the cause of making this world a more humane and loving place.

Having this hope is what my father's life is all about.

Thank you.