

Assistant Register Brown Causes Public Uproar

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Assistant Register of Copyrights William Brown caused a public uproar in 1926 when he denied registration because the applicant was trying to register her claim to copyright using her maiden name. Virginia Douglass Hyde, wife of Denver lawyer Albert Vogl, wrote poetry and plays and for years had registered works using her maiden name.

But when she submitted a claim in 1926, Brown wrote to Hyde saying, "Registrations by married women should be made in their married name, that is, the given name of the wife followed by the husband's name. This is in accordance with the general recognized practice of all Government offices as well as all courts, and to deviate from it would cause confusion to the copyright records and probably embarrass the copyright claimant herself if the copyright came into litigation."

Brown was not counting on the indignation stirred up by this missive when the National Women's Party found out about it. The party, which had already secured a woman's right to obtain a passport using a maiden name, immediately sent representatives to meet with Register of Copyrights Thorvald Solberg.

Led by Mabel Vernon, national executive secretary of the party, the delegation sat down with Solberg on December 20, 1926. Under



Virginia Douglass Hyde

pressure, the Register modified Brown's statement, saying that it was not a Copyright Office rule that married women could not use their maiden names but that when "an explanation of the reasons why the author of the work in question desires registration in her own maiden name" accompanies the application, the Office was "quite willing" to register such a claim.

Women authors' outrage grew. The *New York Times* of December 21, 1926, reported negative comments on the registration policy from Ruth Hale, president of the Lucy Stone League

that fought for preservation of maiden names; Fannie Hurst, well-known novelist; Freda Kirchwey, journalist and managing editor of *The Nation*; and Elinor Wylie, poet. Nathalia Crane, a 13-year-old child prodigy poet, who was preparing a poem on John Paul Jones, quipped that she would be glad to register under her husband's name if he were a man like Jones.

Just in time to keep the peace, Representative Sol Bloom of New York, who held the first copyright issued in the 20th century (See the March 2004 issue of *Copyright Notices*.) and who was hailed as a "modern knight errant" in the *Washington Post* (December 24, 1926), introduced a bill that affirmed the validity of registrations of claims to copyright made in a woman's maiden name. ©