

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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**"Santa Claus Can't Say That I've Forgotten Anything." by Thomas Nast.
From *Harper's Weekly*, Dec. 25, 1886.**

INSIDE: Stevenson in Monterey



Robert Louis Stevenson

This year Stevenson House will be one of several homes open to the public for the celebration of "Christmas in the Adobes."

The glowing candles, fragrant Yuletide wreaths, and, above all, the Scottish music, will invite the passer-by to spend some time in the old building. Who knows if the vagrant spirit of its most famous lodger may not be recalled to this old house?

Houston Street's Famous Lodger

BY ELLEN COULTER

*'Twas the night before Christmas
And all through the house
Not a creature was stirring,
Not even a mouse.*

-Clement Clarke Moore

On Christmas Eve, perhaps no mouse stirs, but would you believe a ghost? As with Dickens' Christmas Eve apparitions, Monterey, too, can boast of its own Christmas season ghost. Stevenson House's "Lady in Black," purported to be Manuela Girardin, wife of a former owner of the residence, apparently chooses December to reappear in the upstairs nursery of the residence. According to some accounts, she materializes in a high-collared black dress to watch over two desperately sick grandchildren. Certainly this is a romantic story but one which fails to jibe with known historical facts. A far more restless spirit did inhabit the house briefly, in December of 1879, however, and it is for Robert Louis Stevenson that the building is named.

Approaching the grey-shuttered residence, it is not hard to believe that other-worldly presences would choose this fine structure for their abode. Originally the Gonzales adobe, the former house and hotel is tucked away on Houston Street (formerly Merchants Row) far from the hustle and bustle of modern Monterey. Now part of the California Park System and open to visitors, Stevenson House invitingly conjures up visions of early California, when cattle was king and bear and bull fights were common entertainment. The house was built in 1841 for Lieutenant Jose Rafael Gonzales who came to Monterey with the newly appointed Governor Figueroa. Gonzales held numerous government posts, in both Monterey and San Juan Bautista.

He was the local collector of customs from 1833 to 1836 and served as Alcalde of Monterey in 1846. He dreamed of erecting a "little castle", modeled after a grand casa in his home town in Mexico, but settled for simpler architecture and actually lived there only intermittently. The property was sold to Jose Abrego in 1856, who resold it a month later to Jean Girardin and his partner Pablo Fassanini. Girardin enlarged the existing structure, creating a residence on the second floor while renting out the rest of the building to several small enterprises.

Girardin died in the summer of 1879. His widow Dona Manuela Girardin continued to live at the house but rented out several rooms to lodgers. At this

time it became known as "The French Hotel."

Stevenson, "the queer lank lad in the velvet coat," began his stay in Monterey on August 30, 1879. He arrived by narrow gauge railroad to be with "the woman he loved," Fanny Osbourne, who was ten years his senior. It is noted that he was driven from the railroad stop, a dusty mile from town, by one Manuel Wolter, whose descendants still live in Carmel Valley. Fittingly enough, Manuel's first stop was the Bohemia Saloon, located approximately where the Doubletree Inn now stands. It is reported that Stevenson fortified himself with a stiff brandy before seeking out Mrs. Osbourne who was renting rooms from Maria Ygnacio Bonifacio.

Stevenson, only 29, had met the married Fanny in Grez, France, several years earlier and had been captivated by her "swarthy gypsy beauty, with clear cut cameo features, curly black hair and glittering golden eyes." Volatile and independent, she was capable of irresistible charm and possessed a keen intelligence. The two were instantly attracted to each other, and two years passed while the lovers continued their liaison in Paris. Fanny with her two children, Belle and Lloyd, (a second son, Hervey, had died in France) returned to California to secure a divorce from her unfaithful, but dashing handsome husband, Sam Osbourne, whom she had married when she was only sixteen. Also staying with Fanny was her younger sister, Nellie Van de Grift, who, by coincidence, was then being courted by Adolfo Sanchez, one of the owners of the Bohemia. Stevenson later wrote of his first impressions of Monterey:

The town, when I was there, was a place of two or three streets, economically paved with sea sand, and two or three lanes, which were watercourses in the rainy season, and were, at all times, rent up by fissures four or five feet deep. There were no street lights. Short sections of wooden sidewalk only added to the dangers of the night, for they were often high above the level of the roadway, and no one could tell where they would be likely to begin or end. The houses were, for the most part, built of unbaked adobe brick, many of them old for so new a country, some of very elegant proportions, with low, spacious, shapely rooms, and walls so thick that the heat of summer never dried them to the heart.

Having traveled 6000 miles to be with Fanny and spur her on to divorce Sam, Stevenson first boarded with Rosanna Leese on Calle Principal, next to the Larkin House. After the first week, he was evicted from his \$7 a week room because of his eczema which apparently marred his features. It is reported, in fact, that Miss Leese burned all his bedding after he left.

In ill health, and depressed by Fanny's lack of action to obtain her freedom, Stevenson spent approximately three weeks in Carmel Valley. Part of that time he was desperately ill and probably would have died except for being found by an old bear hunter, Jonathan Wright, who took him to his ranch house and nursed him back to health. Upon his return to Monterey, Stevenson took up



The Bohemia Saloon where Stevenson got his first “taste of Monterey.” The struggling writer often visited the bar, one of whose owners later became his brother-in-law.

residence in the French Hotel and continued work on several books which he had started. He also apparently had some time for socializing. Once he took Fanny to a ball at the Bagley Opera House on Alvarado Street. Writes Augusta Fink in her book ‘Monterey:’

“Stevenson escorted Fanny, elegant in a garnet velvet gown. Young Isobel (Belle) Osbourne and Fanny’s sister, Nellie, both wore Spanish dresses of red and yellow silk, trimmed in black lace, which they borrowed from their landlady’s daughter.”

Stevenson had another bout of pleurisy and became so weak that he alarmed his landlady, Dona Manuela, who summoned her son-in-law, Dr. J.P. Heintz. As there was no hospital in town, Dr. Heintz brought the sick man to live with him in his combination home and office on the west side of Alvarado Street. This reportedly greatly upset the good doctor’s wife, Marie Clementine, who was expecting a child very soon.

Stevenson’s bouts of illness apparently drove Fanny to take action in securing the divorce. She moved to Oakland to wait discreetly for the outcome of her divorce proceedings, leaving Stevenson in Monterey. But he was not dismayed.

“In coming here I did the right thing; I have not only got Fanny patched up again and in health, but the effect of my arrival has straightened up

everything," he wrote his friend Sidney Colvin in London on October 21. "As now arranged, there is to be a private divorce in January . . . and yours truly will be a married man as soon thereafter as the law and decency permit. The only question is whether I shall be alive for the ceremony."

Although he had published several books, Stevenson was not an established writer at the time. His father grudgingly gave him a small remittance and the rest of his income consisted of dribblets of royalties from his publisher. Wracked by ill health and pinched by poverty, he nevertheless seemed to enjoy his two months in Monterey, even though separated from Fanny.

The well known friendship between Stevenson and Jules Simoneau has often been told. Simoneau, a warm-hearted Frenchman who owned a restaurant nearby, fed him--often free--, played chess with him and 'discussed the universe' with him, but he had other acquaintances as well. Several letters to his friends outline his life at this time:

To Sidney Colvin, October:

Monterey is a place where there is no summer or winter, and pines and sand and distant hills and a bay all filled with real water from the Pacific. You will perceive that no expense has been spared. I now live with a little French doctor; I take one of my meals in a little French restaurant; for the other two, I sponge. The population of Monterey is about that of a dissenting chapel on a wet Sunday in a strong church neighborhood.

To W.E. Henley, October:

This is a lovely place, which I am growing to love. The Pacific licks all other oceans out of hand; there is no place but the Pacific Coast to hear eternal roaring surf. When I get to the top of the woods behind Monterey, I can hear the seas breaking all round over ten or twelve miles of coast from near Carmel - on my left, out to Point Pinas (sic) in front, and away to the right along the sands of Monterey to Castroville and the mouth of the Salinas. I was wishing yesterday that the world could get - no, what I mean was that you should be kept in suspense like Mahomet's coffin until the world had made half a revolution, then dropped here at the station as though you had stepped from the cars; you would then comfortably enter Walter's waggon (sic) (the sun has just gone down, the moon beginning to throw shadows, you hear the surf rolling, and smell the sea and the pines). That shall deposit you at Sanchez's saloon, where we take a drink; you are introduced to Bronson, the local editor. ('I have no brain music,' he says; 'I'm a mechanic, you see,' but he's a nice fellow); to Adolpho Sanchez, who is delightful. Meantime I go to the P.O. for my mail; thence we walk up Alvarado Street together, you now floundering in the sand, now merrily stumping on the wooden side-walks; I call at Hadsell's for my paper; at length behold us installed at Simoneau's little whitewashed back-room, round a dirty tablecloth, with Francois the baker, perhaps an Italian fisherman, perhaps Augustin Dutra, and Simoneau himself. Simoneau, Francois, and I are the three sure cards; the others mere waifs. Then home... I

sleep on the floor in my camp blankets; you install yourself abed; in the morning coffee with the little doctor and his little wife; we hire a waggon (sic) and make a day of it...I expect other letters now steadily. If I have to wait another two months, I shall begin to be happy.

To Edmund Gosse, November 15:

I will send you herewith a Monterey paper where the works of R.L.S. appear, nor only that, but all my life on studying the advertisements will become clear. I lodge with Dr. Heintz; take my meals with Simoneau; have been only two days ago shaved by the tonsorial artist Michaels; drink daily at the Bohemia saloon; get my daily paper from Hadsell's; was stood a drink to-day by Albano Rodriguez; in short, there is scarce a person advertised in that paper but I know him, and I may add scarce a person in Monterey but is there advertised. The paper is the marrow of the place.

In spite of his bouts of illness, Stevenson was a prodigious walker and the nearby ocean fascinated him. He describes some of his hikes in a piece later entitled 'The Old Pacific Capital:'

These long beaches are enticing to the idle man. It would be hard to find a walk more solitary and at the same time more exciting to the mind. Crowds of ducks and seagulls hover over the sea. Sandpipers trot in and out by troops after the retiring waves, trilling together in a chorus of infinitesimal song. Strange sea-tangles, new to the European eye, the bones of whales, or sometimes a whole whale's carcass (sic), white with carrion-gulls and poisoning the wind, lie scattered here and there along the sands. The waves coming in slowly, vast and green, curve their translucent necks, and burst with a surprising uproar, that runs, waxing and waning, up and down the long keyboard of the beach. The foam of these great ruins mounts in an instant to the ridge of the sand glacié, swiftly flees back again, and is met and buried by the next breaker. The interest is perpetually fresh. On no other coast that I know shall you enjoy in calm, sunny weather, such a spectacle of Ocean's greatness, such beauty of changing colour, or such degrees of thunder in the sound. The very air is more than usually salt by this Homeric deep.

In shore, a tract of sand-hills borders on the beach. Here and there a lagoon, more or less brackish, attracts the birds and hunters. A rough, spotty undergrowth partially conceals the sand. The crouching, hardy, live-oaks flourish singly or in thickets--the kind of wood for murderers to crawl among--and here and there the skirts of the forest extend downward from the hills, with a floor of turf and long aisles of pine-trees hung with Spaniard's Beard. Through this quaint desert the railway cars drew near to Monterey from the junction at Salinas City--though that and so many other things are now for ever altered--and it was from here that you had your first view of the old township lying in the sands, its white windmills bickering in the chill, perpetual wind, and the first fogs of the evening drawing drearily around it from the sea.

One day he made a discovery:

One day - I shall never forget it - I had taken a trail that was new to me. After a while the woods began to open, the sea to sound nearer at hand. I came upon a road, and, to my surprise, a stile. A step or two further, and, without leaving the woods, I found myself among trim houses. I walked through street after street, parallel and at right angles, paved with sward and dotted with trees, but still undeniable streets, and each with its name posted at the corner, as in a real town. Facing down the main thoroughfare--"Central Avenue," as it was ticketed--I saw an open-air temple, with benches and sounding-board, as though for an orchestra. The houses were all tightly shuttered; there was no smoke, no sound but of the waves, no moving thing. I have never been in any place that seemed so dreamlike. Pompeii is all in a bustle with visitors, and its antiquity and strangeness deceive the imagination; but this town had plainly not been built above a year or two, and perhaps had been deserted over night. Indeed, it was not so much like a deserted town as like a scene upon the stage by daylight and with no one on the boards. The barking of a dog led me at last to the only house still occupied, where a Scotch pastor and his wife pass the winter alone in this empty theatre. The place was "The Pacific Camp Grounds, The Christian Seaside Resort". Thither, in the warm season, crowds come to enjoy a life of teetotalism, religion, and flirtation, which I am willing to think blameless and agreeable. The neighbourhood at least is well selected. The Pacific booms in front. Westward is Point Pinos, with the lighthouse in a wilderness of sand, where you will find the lightkeeper playing the piano, making models and bows and arrows, studying dawn and sunrise in amateur oil-painting, and with a dozen other elegant pursuits and interests to surprise his brave, old country rivals.

Stevenson attended San Carlos Day at the Carmel Mission on November 4 and in the same article described the ceremonies which took place among what were then little more than ruins.

The mission church is roofless and ruinous; sea breezes and sea fogs, and the alternation of the rain and sunshine, daily widening the breaches and casting the crockets from the wall. As an antiquity in this new land, a quaint specimen of missionary architecture, and a memorial of good deeds, it had a triple claim to preservation from all thinking people; but neglect and abuse have been its portion. There is no sign of American interference, save where a headboard has been torn from a grave to be a mark for pistol bullets. So it is with the Indians for whom it was erected.

Their lands, I was told, are being yearly encroached upon by the neighbouring American proprietor, and with that exception no man troubles his head of the Indians of Carmel. Only one day in the year, the day before our Guy Faux, the padre drives over the hills from Monterey; the little sacristy, which is the only covered portion of the church, is filled with seats and decorated for the service; the Indians troop together, their bright dresses contrasting with their dark and melancholy faces; and there, among a crowd of somewhat unsympathetic holiday makers, you may hear God served with perhaps more touching circumstances than in any other temple under heaven. An Indian, stone blind and about eighty years of age,

conducts the singing; other Indians compose the choir; yet they have the Gregorian music at their finger ends, and pronounce the Latin so correctly that I could follow the meaning as they sang. The pronunciation was odd and nasal, the singing hurried and staccato. "In saccula sacculo-ho-horum," they went, with a vigorous aspirate to every additional syllable. I have never seen faces more vividly lit up with joy than the faces of these Indian singers. It was to them not only the worship of God, nor an art by which they recalled and commemorated better days, but was besides an exercise of culture, where all they knew of art and letters was united and expressed.

As Christmas approached, Stevenson felt he could no longer stay so far away from his beloved Fanny. As he left Monterey in late December to take up lodging in San Francisco, he had a few parting observations:

But revolution in this world succeeds to revolution. All that I say in this paper is in a paulo-past tense. The Monterey of last year exists no longer. A huge hotel has sprung up in the desert by the railway. Three sets of diners sit down successively to table. Invaluable toilettes figure along the beach and between the live oaks; and Monterey is advertised in the newspapers, and posted in the waiting-rooms at railway stations, as a resort for wealth and fashion. Alas for the little town! It is not strong enough to resist the influence of the flaunting caravanserai, and the poor, quaint, penniless native gentlemen of Monterey must perish like a lower race, before the millionaire vulgarians of the Big Bonanza.

On May 19 of 1880 Stevenson and Fanny were finally married and it was about this time, too, that Stevenson's fortunes began to improve. Several articles and poems were published and the work he had done in Monterey began to come together. He wrote his friend Colvin shortly after arriving in San Francisco:

"But I have to stick to work now; and here's December gone and pretty much useless. But, lord love you, October and November saw a great harvest. It might have affected the price of paper on the Pacific Coast. . ."

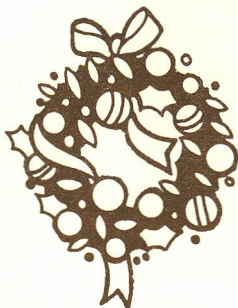
After Stevenson's departure from Monterey, the fortunes of the French Hotel gradually declined. At one time the large room below the Girardins' apartment served as a tavern and after that a carriage shop. The building continued to deteriorate and after the turn of the century became a place for cheap lodging and the haunt of impoverished artists. After Stevenson became established as a writer, someone carefully painted 'Stevenson House' over 'The French Hotel' on the sign facing Houston Street.

Today, a picket fence surrounds the front of the property, and although the grey front door remains much as Stevenson would remember, guests must enter through the back. In fact no modern visitor could gain entry to this adobe had it not been for Stevenson's brief stay. In almost total disrepair, the

building was scheduled for destruction in 1937, but was saved at the last minute by the efforts of two women. Mrs. C. Tobin Clark and Edith Van Antwerp purchased the property, renovated the structure, and presented it to the State of California in 1942 as a museum of Stevensoniana. A tree was planted in the lovely gardens in back to commemorate this event, marking the preservation of another of Monterey's memory-filled adobes.

SOURCES:

1. **Adobes in the Sun** - Photographs by Morley Baer, Text by Augusta Fink, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1972.
2. **The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson**, in two volumes, Graham Balfour, New York, Charles Scribner's Son, published Oct. 1901. The Devinne Press.
3. **Monterey - The Presence of the Past**, Augusta Fink, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, copyright 1972.
4. **Letters and Miscellanies of Robert Louis Stevenson -- New Letters**, selected by Sidney Colvin, published in New York, 1920, copyright 1912.
5. **Under Three Flags** - Margaret B. Pumphrey, Pilgrim Stories, The Caxton Printers, Ltd., Caldwell, Idaho, copyright 1939.
6. **Robert Louis Stevenson in California**, a Remarkable Courtship - Roy Nickerson, Chronicle Books, copyright 1982.



Many of Monterey's historic buildings will be open on Thursday and Friday, December 18 and 19 from 5 to 9 p.m. For a single admission fee, one can visit any or all of the following: Casa Gutierrez, Casa Soberanes, Cooper-Molera, Custom House, Old Whaling Station, House of the Four Winds and Larkin House, where refreshments will be served, and, in some cases, entertainment provided. Colton Hall, the Boston Store and the Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art will also be open without charge.

The Monterey History and Art Association will also welcome visitors to its headquarters at the Casa Serrano. Punch will be served and several ensembles will provide Christmas music.



The rear of The Stevenson House shows its delapidated condition after the turn of the century. This area was replanted with a beautiful garden during restoration. (Photo from the Pat Hathaway collection).

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