

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 16, 1949

The old French Hotel, now the Robert Louis Stevenson Memorial, was built in 1832 as a residence for Don Rafael Gonzales, Customs Collector for the Spanish port of Monterey. The house is now a state monument and is housing much material of historical value and general interest. Although not finished, either from the standpoint of painting and cleaning or from proper arrangement of the exhibits, the big house is certainly worth a visit and the gardens are delightful.

In one of the large rooms downstairs are several interesting articles loaned by Monterey County residents. One is an old wooden bench, owned by Mis Ana Zabala. Many years ago the late Sheriff Thomas Watson, according to the story related by Miss Zabala, told her that he had a favorite bench at his home in the Corral de Tierra, that had once belonged to her grandfather, W. E. P. Hartnell, the founder of the founder of the first college near Salinas and the official government interpreter at the Constitutional Convention in Monterey. Hartnell Street in Monterey was named for him and the family home stood where the Monterey Hospital stands now. Mr. Watson also told Miss Zabala that when he passed away the bench would be hers.

When Mr. Watson died a member of the family remembered that he had said to Miss Zabala, "Someday, Ana, this bench should go back to you," and she was told to come and get the bench. So she hired a driver and buckboard and went to Corral de Tierra and brought the bench back to Monterey, where it had begun life those many years ago – probably more than one hundred years ago.

Mrs. D. L. Mason of Salinas has loaned an unusual and small wooden truck, obviously handmade, which was bought by her father, John Henry Lisk, when he came to California in the 1850's with his brother Myron Lisk. John Lisk married Mary Lugarda Castro and she became the mother of Mrs. Mason. The trunk is painted a soft blue, is without lining and has an interesting old lock.

Mrs. Mason has also loaned an old rocking chair which came across the plains with the Potter and Lisk families, all of whom settled in the Salinas Valley. The rocker was lashed with rawhide when the original seat wore out, because there was no cane and no cane weaver to be found to mend it.

Mrs. Millie Birks of Monterey has given a charming little rocking chair which had been included in the original furnishing of the old Washington Hotel, now the location of the Herald building.

Long ago in Monterey the residents used small braseros or tiny iron stoves without chimneys to heat their rooms. A very old one – probably about 90 years old, according to Abel Espinosa, is now on display in the same room with the bench and old trunk. The little stove is about 18 inches high and is accompanied by an iron plate with a long handle, with which the top was covered or used as a fan to start the fire.

Mr. Espinosa has loaned the brasero to the Stevenson House exhibit, where it has been admired and examined by the several hundred visitors who have already signed the register in this historic building since its opening.

Able Espinosa was born in Monterey 94 years ago on December 6, the son of Pedro and Louise Espinosa. He is particularly interested in Monterey - past and present – and is a member of the Monterey History and Art Association, and always an enthusiastic attendant at the annual Merienda on June 3. He makes his home with his daughter, Mrs. Antonette Spiegler, in Oak Grove. Another daughter, Mrs. Louise Torres, lives in San Francisco. His five golf pro sons live in various parts of the country – Raymond in Chicago, Able at Morro Bay, Al in Mexico City, Henry and Romie in San Francisco.

When Robert Louis Stevenson was in Monterey and a resident at the old French Hotel, he saw lovely Elena Soler, and art pupil of Tavernier, the French artist, who also had a room in the historic old hotel, now know as the Stevenson House. Impressed by her youthfulness and charm, he wrote a poem and dedicated it to her, calling it "The White Rose of Monterey."

Elena Soler was born in Monterey, the daughter and only child of Don Alberto Soler and Francisca Gomez Soler, affectionately known as "Dona Pachita."

Don Albert Soler, a native of Barcelona, Spain, came to Monterey, with a class of young Dominican students who enrolled in the Dominican Priory on Larkin Street. On this property, in later years, stood the A. A. Manuel home. Seeing that his was not a priestly vocation, he left the priory, met and married Dona Pachita.

Elena married Achilles Chaine, a native of San Francisco and of French parentage. He was a graduate of St. Mary's College and later attended Hopkins Art Institute

in San Francisco. Their children are Mrs. Harvey Mundell of Monterey, who with her two daughters, Joan and Marvis, live in the family home on Dutra Street: Charles Chaine of Monterey Miss Ruth Chaine of New York City. Both Mr. and Mrs. Chaine passed away in the early 1900's.

Charles Chaine has among his many treasured possessions a paint box that had belonged to Jules Tavernier, one of the original group of artists who discovered the beauties of the Peninsula, when he painted here in Monterey.