

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A New Stevenson Book Is Published

"The Stevensons: Louis and Fanny" by Laura L. Hinkley has recently come from the press of Hastings House in New York. Monterey folk and all Californians are developing more and more interest in the life and works of Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife, who spent some time in Monterey, San Francisco, Oakland and in a cottage at the foot of Mt. St. Helena, before going to Scotland and finally to Samoa. Monterey should be particularly interested because of the Stevenson House here, now State owned and opened to the public. It was in this house that Stevenson lived for a time during his stay in Monterey. To it have come, through donations from admirers and from his stepdaughter, Mrs. Isobel Field, many pieces of furniture, first editions and mementos once owned and used by the author.

Mrs. Laura L. Hinkley, author of "The Stevensons," died while the manuscript was in the publisher's hands, so the foreword is written by her sisters. They give special credit to Anne Roller Essler, whose book "Happier For His Presence," describes Stevenson's life in San Francisco, and thank her for her assistance in verifying facts of the California period. Mrs. Essler was for a time an assistant curator at the Old Custom House in Monterey.

Joseph Henry Jackson, well known book reviewer, writes: "Even if you add his Monterey sojourn, his San Francisco period and the weeks at Silverado, the total is a very brief space in his short 44 years of life. But Stevenson has special meaning to the Californian nevertheless, as he should for many reasons."

It is always interesting to read of Monterey, its adobes and life here in the late 1800's. In Mrs. Hinkley's book she relates: "In Monterey Sam Osbourne (Mrs. Stevenson's first husband) took them to a two-story adobe house on the main street standing in a beautifully walled garden, the house of Senora Bonifacio, who lived in part of it, while the Osbournes occupied the rest. The three women, Fanny Osbourne, her sister, Nellie Van der Grift, who later became Mrs. Sanchez, and Isobel Osbourne, who later married Joe Strong, the artist, had ponies and were expert horsemen. In the Senora's house, said Isobel, "Nellie and I settled down to a happy summer." No doubt it

was. Each of them was being courted by the man she married."

Later in the book the author describes Stevenson's arrival in Monterey: "He reached San Francisco on the 30th of August and went on at once to Monterey... He had sought to alleviate the misery, according to his habit, by a tour of the surrounding country, but conceded enough to the different nature of the country to make it a riding rather than a walking trip. Eighteen miles out of Monterey, he collapsed physically."... After two nights in the open, "He was discovered by a neighboring rancher, 'an old frontiersman,' who pronounced him 'real sick,' took him to the ranch and nursed him."

"I now live with a French doctor," he wrote a friend. He had a large airy room with five windows but no heat. "I take all my meals in a little French restaurant" – Jules Simoneau's – "for the other two, I sponge."

Later: "Louis remained in Monterey, as he had expected, till it was almost Christmas. It was during this time that he improved his acquaintance with Jules Simoneau, with whom he had already begun to 'discuss the universe and play chess daily,' a 'most pleasant old boy,' loving to hear his own language spoken as Louis spoke it, loving the young man's courage and gaiety. During this time Louis became a reporter on the Monterey Californian at a salary of two dollars a week; it is said that this was by Jules Simoneau's connivance with the editor."

A few days before Christmas Louis went to San Francisco, according to historical data, and took lodging at 608 Bush street. And so ends Robert Louis Stevenson life in Monterey.

Because of the nature of the subject matter this book is the most romantic of Miss Hinkley's books. And in it she has succeeded beautifully in capturing the great personal charm that made the author of "Treasure Island" and "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" perhaps the most attractive figure of a man of letters in his generation. We think that all Monterey residents would find the story fascinating – there are so many old timer local persons mentioned, so much of the background of the old town combined with good writing.

Miss Hinkley is also the author of "Charlotte and Emily: The Brontes" and "Ladies of Literature," which included besides the Brontes, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot.

Invitations will be in the mail within a few days announcing the observance of the one hundredth birthday of Robert Louis Stevenson. The Monterey History and Art Association, Ltd., are to be hosts at the affair which will be held in the Stevenson House in Monterey on Sunday afternoon, November 12, at 2:30 o'clock.