

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Stevenson Memorial Gifts

The antique secretary-desk, a black wood cupboard, a charming miniature desk, a chess set and several more valuable articles have been added to the collection of personal possessions of Robert Louis Stevenson which have recently arrived at the Stevenson House in Monterey. They are the gifts to the Stevenson Memorial from his stepdaughter, Mrs. Isobel Field who now makes her home in Santa Barbara.

The antique secretary desk is distinguished not only for the fact that it is old and has traveled half-way around the world and back, but that it was originally in the Edinburgh home of Thomas Stevenson, engineer father of R.L.S. From there it was moved to the author's home in Bournemouth, England, and then to Vallima, Samoa, where Stevenson died in 1894.

According to information furnished by Mrs. Field, the desk was hauled to Vallima in a bullock cart driven by Solomon Island natives, and remained there until Mrs. Stevenson left the Island, taking it with her to San Francisco. In 1910, after surviving the San Francisco fire, it was taken to "Stonehedge," her home in Santa Barbara. Upon the death of Mrs. Stevenson, the desk was taken to New York by Isobel Field and finally returned to her home in Carpinteria.

Other pieces of furniture that made the trips with the desk are an antique carved black wood cupboard and a captain's writing desk. The writing desk originally belonged to Stevenson's mother, who received it as a wedding gift. On it she wrote the letters later published in book form. The cupboard Stevenson used to store things nobody wanted and he called it the "Re-ci-pock-ed."

Of the small Buddha which will also find a resting place in the Stevenson House, Mrs. Field has written:

"Robert Louis Stevenson had a long table made in Asia by Mr. Willis, the carpenter. He preferred it to all his handsome desks. On it I wrote to his dictation, in a handwriting like this, his letters to Iver and Hermiston. At the end of the table, opposite to where I sat, this little Buddha presided. I arranged several books to make steps and covered them with red velvet. Beside the little statue Sosimo always placed a slim silver vase holding a fresh gardenia.

"This Buddha was brought from India by the uncle of R.L.S., Captain Balfour. I was told by a Japanese Buddhist that this idol is very old, belonging to early days when the priests of each temple carved its idols."

A very handsome chess set, formerly used by the Stevensons, is also among the gifts. Made of red and white bone the set is complete except for one missing pawn. With the chess set is an Oriental chess board of black and gold lacquer in an excellent state of preservation.

An interesting old mahogany wine cooler and 11 chairs were also sent by Mrs. Field to the Stevenson House. Six of the chairs are alike and from one who is an authority on antique furniture we have been told that they are among the finest examples of Sheraton she had ever seen. The other five chairs are small, very charming and very old. A small flat-top desk of good design will be placed in the curator's office.

Mrs. Susana Silva and Mrs. Ida M. Everett, both of Pacific Grove, were visitors at the Custom House [?Stevenson House] recently. Mrs. Silva was Miss Susana Escobar, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Escobar, before her marriage. As a young girl she lived with her parents in the north wing of the Stevenson House and played in the garden, but she was never allowed to go into the rest of the large adobe, so her recent visit was her first to the building at the south end.

Jacob Escobar passed away in April of 1907 at the age of 78 years, at which time he was one of the oldest native Californians in the state, according to a death notice in the Pacific Grove Daily Review. He had made his home with his daughter, Mrs. Silva, although he was the owner of a ranch down the coast. Mrs. Escobar was Manuella Sota and was the mother of 24 children of which 10 grew to manhood and womanhood.

Mrs. Silva and Mrs. Everett make their home with their son and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. L.W. Silva in Pacific Grove. Mrs. Silva Jr. is the daughter of Mrs. Everett.