

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Famous Inkwell

Robert Louis Stevenson, in describing the furnishings of an English Inn parlor in "An Autumn Effect," one of his essays on Nature, says: "Everything was in keeping, down to the ponderous leaden ink stand on the round table." This very inkstand has been presented to the fast-growing museum at the Stevenson House in Monterey by Richard Holland of Fresno.

Holland came into possession of the inkstand because he was born in the Inn described by Stevenson and grew up there. His father, Joseph S. Holland, was the innkeeper and in that capacity played host to Stevenson when the author stopped over night in the inn in 1875. The younger Holland brought the large pewter inkstand into the Custom House a few days ago and said he was happy to leave it there among the other Stevenson mementos, for an indefinite period.

The inn was, according to Mr. Holland, probably still is, the Red Lion in Wendover, which he says is "about 25 miles from Marble Arch in London."

In the essay Stevenson tells of walking into Wendover on an Autumn day, of his observances in the Inn and elsewhere in the village and his trip by dogcart to the Tring railroad station. A brother and a sister of Mr. Holland, Elizabeth and John, are the only Wendover residents mentioned by Stevenson.

"My landlord had a very pretty little daughter, whom we will call Lizzie," wrote Stevenson. "I had struck up an acquaintance with this little damsel in the morning, and professed much interest in her dolls ... I had not been very long in the parlour before the door opened, and in came Miss Lizzie with two dolls tucked under her brother, John, a year or so younger than herself, not simply to play propriety at our interview, but to show off his twin whips in emulation of his sister's dolls."

Because he was born 12 years later, Richard Holland missed out on helping to entertain the distinguished author. It was his sister, Lizzie, who later presented the inkstand to him.

The stand is made of pewter, not lead, as Stevenson wrote. It is a "ponderous" article, as he noted. The top is affixed to its own tray. The top of the stand is circled by holes, presumably for pens and in the center under a

hinged metal cap is the inkwell containing a chinaware vessel for the ink.

Holland says that he remembers one of the characters in the essay, the man who drove the dogcart, as an employee of his innkeeper father. Of the man Stevenson wrote: "The fellow who drove me was something of a humorist; and his conversation was all in praise of the agricultural labourer's way of life."

Holland said in an interview that this inn was part of a manorial estate and his father merely leased the establishment. The son recalls seeing the date 1629 on the rear of the building. Richard Holland went to Canada at the age of 17 years and worked as a carpenter. He enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1914 in Victoria and served four years and a half in France. When he was mustered out in 1919 he went to Fresno to visit another brother, Charles Holland, and has lived there ever since.

Describing the inn Stevenson wrote: "The interior of the inn was answerable to the outside; indeed, I never saw any room much more to be admired than the low wainscoted parlour, ... The wainscote was white, and there was a turkey carpet on the floor, so old that it might have been imported by Walter Shandy before he retired ... The corner cupboard was agreeable in design; and there were just the right things upon the shelves – decanters and tumblers, and blue plates, and one red rose in a glass of water. The furniture was old-fashioned and stiff. Everything was in keeping, down to the ponderous leaden inkstand on the round table."

Visitors to the Stevenson House will be delighted with the appearance of two of the upstairs rooms. The large room facing Houston Street, which in the old days was known as "Merchants Street" – the one with the nice old fireplace – is now a charming little parlor. It is furnished with antique furniture of the period put there through the generosity of Mrs. Dorothy Greene Chapman of Carmel. There are several old chairs covered with mellow old needlepoint, a sofa, an English card table, a beautiful secretary desk, a lacquered Chinese sewing table fully equipped with ivory necessities for the seamstress, hooked rugs and a very rare old Spanish rug which was a gift to the Monterey History and Art Association by an anonymous donor several years ago.

In the bedroom adjoining the parlor is a very old and very large spool bed, acquired through the interest of

Mrs. A.A. Arehart. It is the bed once owned by Milton Little, and the story goes that it was floated into the wharf in Monterey in the very early days – possibly in the early 1850's – because the ship upon which it arrived could not get any nearer to the shore and because the bed was too large for the smaller boats. It was thrown overboard into the water and pulled ashore. Mr. Little was a partner in the mercantile business in Monterey with Thomas O. Larkin and it was he who built the "tin houses" in New Monterey and the original Kimball Hotel.

Through the kindness of the Hentzell Mattress Company and at the suggestion of Mrs. Dungan, the former owner, several mattresses have been donated and so the big bed is made up with a handsome old hand-quilted spread, the loan of Mrs. Chapman and pillow shams given by Mrs. Lawrence Lyon of Pacific Grove. Other appointments are in keeping with the period.