

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 21, 1950

Old Simoneau's Memories of R.L.S.

Charles Warren Stoddard wrote in his diary on August 9, 1905: "A glorious day, fog along the crest of the hills – oh, how beautiful! Very clear this afternoon with fog banks in the distance. Plenty of color everywhere, in earth, sea and sky!

"I got into the Stevenson House today. O, what a dismal place. R.L.S., in one of his letters from Monterey says: "Then home to my great airy rooms, with five windows opening on a balcony." Was this pleasantry or was it an afterthought of the editors of his letters – as Simoneau fears such things may be – a very small room indeed. There is no balcony to the house. I would really like to pass one night in his little room, but the room is taken by a musician who plays all night and sleeps in the daytime so I could not get a peep into it.

"Went out to hear the concert at the Presidio; saw a gunboat painted dark green steal mysteriously into the harbor. She was flying the French flag. She could hardly be seen at all in the dusk."

Stoddard lists the week's performances at the Bagby Opera House as follows: "The Light That Failed" Monday night; "The Man From Mexico," Tuesday; "The Sign of the Four," Wednesday; "The Lindon Bank Robbery," Thursday; Ibsen's "Ghosts," Friday; and "The Silver Dagger," Sunday.

"A copy of R.L.S.'s 'Ebb Tide' has arrived and I shall go to Jules Simoneau's with it tomorrow. O! How I delight in that book, it is to me a constant wonder – my delight and disparage."

It was a dusty walk to Simoneau's. The garden gate stood open, relates Stoddard, and Mrs. Simoneau stood in front of it. He describes her as being 75 years old. He found Simoneau inside and gave him the copy of "The Ebb Tide," and then told him of his visit to the Stevenson House, with his host correcting the information he had gathered from the landlady. After a time the trio went into the garden where Stoddard viewed the 20 varieties of fuchsias which Mrs. Simoneau pointed out and he wrote in his diary that night: "I have never seen such fine – nor such a variety. From a box that was running over, she plucked me this four-leaf clover." (The clover was pressed and neatly fastened in the diary on the 10th of August 1905.)

As he returned down the hill to his room at the Casa Verde on Decatur street, Stoddard relates that he passed the house where the Taverniers and Lizzie and Nolie Strong used to live. Where Fred Somers, Joe Strong, Willie Woodworth went one evening for Welsh rarebit and beer and numberless cigarettes, he recalls. Tavernier was an early-day artist in Monterey and had a studio in the Stevenson House.

The diary continues: "Wandered into a little lane that is banked by a wall of scarlet geraniums twenty-five feet high; they half fill the lane in one place, and there is the dear old-fashioned one-story adobe where General Alvarado lived from 1836-1842! I'd like to see the interior of it. Just below is Colton Hall, the Thos. O. Larkin House, Sherman and Halleck headquarters and the House of Four Winds – the Hall of Records. A most interesting part of town, with something of the old atmosphere still preserved. Would there were more of it here."

On the following Saturday Stoddard reports to his diary that he worked on his "Stevenson's Monterey" until he had finished it, bought some pictures of Monterey and mailed all to Frank Putnam by registered post, "I hope the sketch will suit him and his readers," wrote Stoddard. After attending to these duties he noted that he walked up the street a bit to lift his eyes unto the hill where the soldiers were adding a stone to the Sloat monument.

"Could not buy something I wanted this morning because no one could change a twenty-dollar piece," he wrote on Monday.

Later in August Stoddard again tells of a visit to the Simoneau residence which he then called "Fuchsia Lodge." "I took my little album with me. There stood Simoneau looking particularly well; Mrs. S. wrapped in a mantilla – also in fine feather. We had a most jolly half hour and Jules wrote in my album: "Dear Charles, our friendship as the friendship of R.L. Stevenson will last forever. To Recollect the Ald Lang Zin. J. Simoneau. Delightfully misspelled – I think! But how glad I am to have it."

Simoneau's home was on Van Buren street, just opposite from the Monterey Library. It is now the home of Mrs. Thomas Fussell.