

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Stoddard's Death

Today we will repeat a bit from the diary of Charles Warren Stoddard in which he describes the homes and personalities of some of the important personalities of the early 1800's in Monterey.

Stoddard was born in 1843 and died in 1909. He was an American author and traveler, who lived in San Francisco, Monterey and the Hawaiian Islands From 1873 to 1878 he traveled about the world as correspondent for a San Francisco newspaper. He was professor of English literature at Notre Dame University, where he was a member of the literary group, and later taught at the Catholic University of America. His writings include poems, "South Sea Idyls," "The Lepers of Molokai," "In the Footprints of the Padres," and "The Island of Tranquil Delights."

In his diary written while in Monterey Stoddard describes Father Mestres, long the pastor of the Royal Presidio Chapel, as follows: "Father Mestres, who used to be at the Catholic University of America, came forward and read the notices of the week in English and then in Spanish. Handsome, with the ideal black beard of silken softness, and eyes as fine as a fawn's – his voice and manner typical of the highest breeding – it was a delight to hear him."

He met Evelyn McCormick, the artist, and wrote: "Met Jules Marsfelder. He was brought by Miss McCormick, to whom I am at last introduced. It is funny, for three weeks we have seen each other daily and many times a day and only now do we meet and bow. She is bright and Bohemian and free. Has her studio in the Old Pacific building (a hotel in 1834), where also in one part of the building the Salvation Army has its headquarters."

About an excursion to Carmel in 1905 he noted: "We dipped into the woods and discovered the frame house that George Sterling, the poet, is building for himself and his wife, with the aid of two friends who are amateur carpenters. The site is a pretty one. The house is away from everybody. Looks into the woods, faced a valley and a noble mountain range, but with no sight of the sea. The four of them are now living in tents; their kitchen stove, pantry, dining table – all in the open air and looking very picturesque and pastoral."

On that same day Stoddard visited and had dinner with Frank Powers and his family. Of Mr. Powers, the builder of Carmel-by-the-Sea, he wrote in his diary, "We talked of spooky things and Mr. Powers, a lawyer and promoter, endeavored with a word to demolish every vestige of the supernatural. He is a large overgrown boy, with a very boyish face, and as boyish in his manner as a youth; yet he is the father of three – one of them must be at least 12 and weighs 210 – I go him 10 better."

When he knew Sterling better he jotted down a bit of commentary on him: "Sterling I find is a Catholic who was educated by Cardinal Gibbons at St. Mary's in Maryland, and had thought of being a priest. I do not so far find him very interesting. Probably he never sparkles. He has a remarkable profile which everyone compares to Dante's He looks very youthful."

Leaving the Casa Verde, Stoddard's last days were spent in a pleasant little cottage on the east side of Van Buren, between Scott and Franklin streets. Always with the shining blue bay and fishing fleet in sight.

Laura Bride Powers writes in her book, "Old Monterey": "Carmel Martin, returning from Ann Arbor, had taken up his quarters in the same house. A warm friendship sprang up between the writer and the young lawyer, a friendship that enriched the lives of both – that made enduring that last year of helplessness of the lovable poet.

"When it appeared the end was approaching, it was to this young lawyer-friend that Stoddard turned to prepare his last testament... His death came on April 23, 1909. He was laid to rest in the cemetery on El Estero, a tile from his loved Carmel Mission for his eternal pillow.

"His gravestone was raised by his former colleagues in the Catholic University of Washington, where [he?] held the chair of literature."