

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 4, 1951

When Stevenson Worked For Two Dollars a Week

Leon Rowland of the Sentinel-News in Santa Cruz has sent for use in the Diary another story of a "Hidden Treasure" in Monterey. Mr. Rowland writes: "As you know Robert Louis Stevenson spent a few months in Monterey late in 1878 and was given a job on the local weekly at \$2 a week. One of his contributions appears in the volume of his essays as "The Old Pacific Capital."

Some years ago in the Bancroft library I copied the enclosed from the file of the Californian of that date, which was not the Californian that Semple and Colton had in 1846. On style and content the story may in my opinion, have been Stevenson's work. I present it to you for any use you may want to make."

In the issue of the Californian published December 16, 1879, there appeared this headline: "Hidden Treasure, Ten Thousand Dollars in Gold Dust Buried in the Willows Near Monterey."

The story follows: There are many now living who remember the excitement occasioned on the Atlantic shores by the report of the fabulous wealth Captain Kidd, the noted filibusterer, was said to have buried.

Many were the expeditions organized to search for the hidden treasure, but we do not know that any great amount has ever been discovered. It is only a few years ago that we heard the story of how Walker, in his filibustering expedition through Nicaragua had sacked a church in one of the large cities of a great amount of silver plate and other valuables, how the fortunes of war made it impossible for him to carry it away and of its final burying under the floor of a house.

There are parties who only a year ago were living in Los Angeles who were familiar with the location and if we remember rightly two of Walker's comrades in arms, years after the treasure was buried, repaired to Nicaragua for the purpose of recovering it. They had no trouble in finding the city and the street, but time had changed the "land marks" whereby they expected to find the exact spot, so they rented house after house upon the street and, removing the floors, searched night after night, but without success until their actions became suspicious to the authorities and they were ordered to leave without accomplishing the object of their visit.

Many have been the exhibitions fitted out on the Pacific Coast to search for buried treasure on the Cocos Island, and only a few months have elapsed since the last expedition returned with no better success than its numerous predecessors.

But it remains for Monterey to add to the already long list of buried treasures that have never been found. The incidents as related to us come from a gentleman of unquestionable reliability, and there are many in Monterey at the present time who remember well the visitation of the old man and his son who came from Los Angeles to seek for the hidden gold.

In the years of 1851 and 1852 Monterey was a great commercial distributing point for the different gold discoveries in California. Business was flourishing, as the mines were paying well, and large numbers of miners spent the winter in Monterey. Gambling and crimes of all description held high carnival and as a consequence the city and surrounding country was overrun with horse thieves and desperadoes until forbearance on the part of the better class of citizens "ceased to be a virtue."

At the time, Philip Roach was mayor of Monterey, a live, stirring man, who organized a military company for the purpose of clearing the city of all persons of "questionable character." We are told that they made numerous scouts into the surrounding country, carrying terror and dismay into the ranks of the lawless. In 1852 the section of the country running east of Laguna Seca to the ranch now owned by John Myers, was then known as "The Willows."

(Continued Monday)