

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 20, 1952

Bits of This and That

There comes a time when bits of interesting material gather on one's desk that should be shared with others, so today the Diary will be a bit of this and that.

The Stevenson House, always a fascinating place to visit and browse, has several new pieces of furniture, new arrangements of old items, and a group of new books. At Christmas time Mrs. Isobel Field sent as her gift to Mrs. William Kneass, the curator, a small book entitled "A Bit of My Life." Mrs. Field is the daughter of the late Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson and lived with her mother and stepfather, Robert Louis Stevenson, in Samoa. In her memories Mrs. Field tells of the family life in Honolulu, her meeting with famous and interesting people, later her life with her son, Austin Strong, in Australia, and then at Vailima on the Island of Upolu, where Stevenson died and is buried.

Another small book to add to the Stevensoniana in the library at the old adobe building on Houston street, is "A Last Memory of Robert Louis Stevenson" by Charlotte Eaton. The book was the gift of Mrs. Richard R. Lukins of Riverside. The author was the wife of the artist, Wyatt Eaton, who was an early friend of Stevenson in their student days abroad. She describes their last meeting just before Stevenson left the United States in his further vain quest of health. It was published in 1916.

The third book for the library was given by Al Hoffman of Monterey. It is entitled "Robert Louis Stevenson," a play by Harriet Hinsdale. It was published by The Caxton Printers, Ltd. Of Caldwell, Idaho in 1947, and it also concerns the life of Wyatt Eaton, the artist, mentioned in the second named book. A pen and ink sketch of Stevenson, drawn by Wyatt in 1888 is included in the book.

In 1876 Wyatt, the young twenty-seven year old painter, returned to New York from Paris where he had been associated with Stevenson, and with other iconoclasts like Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Walter Shirlaw, created something of a revolutionary movement which culminated in the founding of the Society of American Artists. Wyatt was the first secretary.

Miss Hinsdale's play represents Stevenson as "all men of good will who have, as he expressed it, 'believed in the ultimate decency of things'." Attention is focused upon two incidents in his life which have significance in a universal sense. He could not shake from his conscience a feeling of guilt in connection with the massacre of General Gordon and his troops at Khartoum. Had he acted at once by making use of his writing, he might have stirred public opinion, he thought, and the general and his men might have been saved. The play goes on to tell of Germany's interest in Samoa, but it [is] Robert Louis Stevenson the beloved British writer, visualized in his home and among his friends which lends the necessary conviction to the play's timeless theme.

My first copy of "The Larkin Papers" published by the Bancroft Library at the University of California and edited by Dr. George P. Hammond, has arrived. It is a beautiful book. The contents are sure to be interesting to the lay person as well as the historian. It is well bound, handsomely printed, well indexed and the papers, documents and letters well chosen for this, the first of ten volumes to be published at intervals, two or here a year, until completed.

A letter to John Paty from Thomas O. Larkin written from Monterey in April of 1842, is a fascinating bit of history. Paty was the skipper of the Don Quixote, then in Honolulu, and having sailed from Monterey with a group of local boys on board bound for school in the Sandwich Islands. Larkin's son, Oliver, was among the young students.

The letter includes the following request: "I wish you would purchase for me in Oahu the following articles and I will pay you the cost and fifty per cent on the same; I am paying here also all duties you may pay.

Zinc fifty to eighty dollars worth with nails to Suit.

Round Iron for bars of Six Windows.

Flat iron for the cross pces.

I keg of spikes for 2 inch plank.

S.I. moss for a bed or large bed ready made.

A bed for my son if he comes with you.

4 or 5 large locks for the custom House. 3 do pad locks.

2 or 3 boxes sperm candles.

1 or 2 chains for hauling logs.

Some kind of candle sticks to hang against the wall – cheap.

5 or 6 reflecting candle sticks.

Set of signs (handsome) for the ball room.

50 or 60 dollars worth of sash, match, and moulding planes.

2 canton trunks, middle size, colour red or chocolate.

Paper (handsome) for 1 room 6 feet high.