

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Time and Poor Varnish

A pageant of Bohemian life in San Francisco at the turn of the century entitled "The Coppa Murals" is being announced as the publication of the Book Club of California. A year ago there came into the possession of the publications committee of the club a set of photographs showing in detail the mural decorations which adorned the old and famous Coppa's Restaurant – the one destroyed by the fire and earthquake in 1906. Many of the artists and writers who frequented Coppa's also spent much time in Monterey and left their mark here.

During the same years that the San Francisco restaurant was in its heyday in San Francisco, the "Bohemia" was popular in Monterey. This celebrated resort was situated in the Gomas block until November of 1891, when it was moved to the Sanchez corner on Franklin and Alvarado. It was owned by Adolpho and Alex Sanchez. Adolpho married Nellie Van de Grift, the sister of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, who was a writer of note and a student of history.

The "Bohemia" received its name in the day when the old capital was the field of action of numerous artists and literary men who had been "attracted hither to depict nature in its grandest form," according to an old clipping we have found. It was while Jules Tavernier, Julian Rix, Stanton, Joe Strong (who married Isabel Osborn, the daughter of Mrs. Stevenson), Charles Rollo Peters and many others who went along pallet in hand placing on canvas such scenery as Monterey could furnish.

During those days the "Bohemia" was their meeting place. It was here where the boys could congregate and tell stories – tell their experiences as they were, and to wile away the dull hours of the night. Sanchez brothers assisted in making life merry with their musical talents. Of those who had congregated there, probably not one remains today.

Jules Tavernier died in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) so the press reported and Robert Louis Stevenson was reported as the only one still heard from in Monterey through his letters from the South Seas to friends here in 1891.

Such were the men who visited this famous old place which in its prime bore evidences of their skill in the shape of a beautifully but hastily drawn landscape or figure, here and there. The old counter had three pretty land pictures painted respectively by Stanton, Peters and Strong. On the door panels were figures drawn by various artists, including Tavernier, and others equally famous. Time and poor varnish were reported to have had their effect on some of these pictures but still many of them were easily recognized as works of art in 1891.

Our correspondent of 61 years ago writes, "No one can enter the place without experiencing a feeling of welcome, while those acquainted with its history are carried back to the ante-railroad days, when nature was in its crudest form, and the quaint old capital was the dreamland of the artist and poet."

When the Casa del Oro at Scott and Oliver streets is opened to the public by the State Parks Commission and restored as the Joseph Boston & Company General Store there will be on display two photographs – one of Thomas W. Day, a partner of Boston in the early days; and one of his wife, Mariana Gomez. The photographs of these pioneers have been presented to the building by Mrs. C. Duval Hyde, the niece of Mrs. Day. The gift is the first to come to the building which is now being restored to its original form and use.

Mrs. Day was the daughter of Rafael Gomez and his wife, Josefa Estrada. The former was the first real lawyer to California, appointed by the Mexican government. Thomas W. Day died in 1862.

Mrs. and Corum Black were visitors at the Stevenson House on Monday. They came north from Santa Barbara where they had visited Isobel Field, the daughter of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson and mother of Austin Strong, their intimate friend in New York. They took particular interest in all the Stevensoniana and the furnishings in the Stevenson House that they might report to Mrs. Field and Mr. Strong of its interesting placement.

Accompanying Mr. and Mrs. Black was their host, Frederick Tillman of Aptos and San Francisco.