

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 18, 1953

Graceful Young Man on a Horse

At this Christmas season it would seem most appropriate that we write about Monterey – the Monterey as it was years ago and as maybe some of the very old-timers remember it. Monterey before progress struck it and before tourists discovered it, the Monterey that Robert Louis Stevenson and his contemporaries knew.

Several years ago Stevenson's stepdaughter Isobel Field, who passed away in Santa Barbara on June 26, 1953, presented furniture, books and many keepsakes of the Scottish poet to the State of California for the Stevenson House in Monterey. Among her gifts was her personal copy of her manuscript for "This Life I've Loved" published in 1937, and containing so much delightful material about Monterey – a great deal of which was not used in the book and which we are printing here probably for the first time. Mrs. William Kneass, the curator at the Stevenson House, discovered the pages recently as she was making a check of the Stevenson material.

Chapter 14 of "This Life I've Loved" has the very simple title "Monterey." This is Mrs. Field's description:

"Monterey, at that time (1879), was the most beautiful old town in the whole state of California. It was almost entirely Spanish in architecture, there being very few frame houses. Old adobe buildings, with arched doorways, cool patios, charming iron work, balconies, and red tile roofs. The principal street was wide and very dusty. Most of the houses were level with the sidewalks which were paved in many places with the vertebra of whales, and at street corners were half buried old Spanish cannons, stuck upright to serve at hitching posts. The entry to many of the walled gardens was under a pair of curving jaw bones of whales.

"The narrow gauge railroad stopped some distance from the town and was met by a lumbering old coach drawn by two or four horses and was usually accompanied by a cavalcade of horsemen.

"Monterey was a peaceful, quiet old town lying between the mountains and the sea; the only sound one heard were the hoofbeats of horses, the jingle of spurs, and the murmur of the waves on the rocky beach. Here and there a shopkeeper dozed in a tilted

chair before his store, his feet on a hitching post, his wide hat pulled down over his eyes.

"The sunlit air was heavy with the scent of roses that flowed in pink clusters over the garden walls. The original Rosa de Castilla, mother of them all, was brought out from Spain by Father Serra and planted first at the old Carmel Mission." In these words Mrs. Field describes her first impressions of Monterey when as a young girl she came to the Peninsula with her parents and brother, Lloyd Osborne.

Mrs. Field gives credit in this chapter to "The artists – Joe Strong, Jules Tavernier, Charles Warren Stoddard (the poet), and Julian Rix – for the discovery of Monterey. They were very sweet about it, dreading what actually happened later – big hotels, a rush of tourists and vandalism in the name of progress."

"When we reached Monterey late in the afternoon," she wrote, "we looked out of the window at the group gathered to meet the train, and the one figure that caught my eye was a slender, graceful young man on a beautiful black horse that reared and plunged in a most spectacular manner. As we stepped down on the platform, he sprang from his horse and came forward to meet us, holding the bridle over his arm. It was Jose Strong in a broad brimmed hat, riding clothes and a wide red sash." From this meeting a romance began which later ended in marriage. Their son was the late Austin Strong, author of "Seventh Heaven" and several other Broadway plays

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