

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 21, 1953

### **A Goat-Holder**

"How I wish I could show you Monterey through my eyes as it was when Nellie and I, looking eagerly out of the coach windows, saw it for the first time," wrote Mrs. Isobel Field in her book "This Life I've Loved." In the chapter entitled "Monterey", she tells of the sights, and happenings, and the people in this sleepy Spanish town when she was a young lady here in 1879.

Mrs. Field was Isobel Osborne in those days. She later married Joe Strong, a well known early California artist, and upon his death became the wife of the late Edward Salisbury Field. Her only son, Austin Strong, well known playwright, died in the East in 1952. Mrs. Field passed away in Santa Barbara last June at the age of 94 years. It was through her generosity that the Stevenson House is now a treasure chest of Stevensioniana, all of which she had inherited from her stepfather, Robert Louis Stevenson, who married her mother, Fanny Osborne, after a European and Monterey romance.

Many of the quotations which we are using in these several columns of the diary, do not appear in "This Life I've Loved", but are from her personal manuscripts or the first draft of the chapter called "Monterey." These papers were given by Mrs. Field to the Stevenson House and with the curator, Mrs. William Kneass' permission, we are privileged to print them here, possibly for the first time.

Telling of the artist colony in Monterey, Mrs. Field first related "My mother painted little portraits, amazing likenesses though perhaps a little too finished and painstaking. Several times she prevailed on me to sit for her but the result was always so very uncomplimentary, or perhaps so true to life, "that I wept on seeing them and refused to sit again."

"Joe Strong had a studio on Main street (Calle Principal), a big room with a north light, and when we were there he was painting his big black horse which he led into the studio and onto a platform. His sister, Ninole, was bribed to hold the bridle. When the patient, long-suffering little sister was not holding the horse for her brother, she was hanging onto a big billy goat her sister, Elizabeth, was painting.

"I can't remember that any of the artists ever painted Monterey. They may have made sketches of the gnarled

and twisted cypress trees and rocks along the coast or the fishing fleet in the bay, but no picture did I ever see of the Custom House, Senorita Bonifacio's garden or the lovely arched doorway and staircase of Senora Sanchez' noble old adobe." (My Attic on Alvarado Street.)

After a brief stay with Joe Strong and his sisters, the Osborne family moved to the house of Miss Bonifacio on Alvarado street, where the First National Bank now stands. They had an entire wing and front, upon a lovely garden full of roses and fruit trees, wrote Mrs. Field.

"It was shut in by a high adobe wall topped by a coping of red tiles. That old wall must have run over 400 feet along the main street and was so high you could not look over it. It was gray and scarred with age and weather and splashing over the red tiles here and there hung masses of roses and grapevines."

Mrs. Field described Miss Bonifacio in a charming manner in her original writing; "The senorita and her mother lived there alone, charming, gracious ladies, who spoke only Spanish and dressed always in black. When they were out they wound long scarfs of lace or silk over their heads."