

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **R. L. S. in Conversation**

Isobel Field, the stepdaughter of Robert Louis Stevenson, writes in her memoirs of Monterey a bit about the surprise arrival here of the famous poet who latter married her mother, Mrs. Fanny Osborne.

"I remember the electric thrill of Louis' arrival and his vivid exciting talk. The whole sleepy town seemed to wake up when he came. He had a room at the house which now bears his name but spent most of his time with us at Senorita Bonifacio's," she wrote.

The description of life at Casa Bonifacio is charming. "We sometimes had our meals in the garden if it was warm and often picked flowers from the 'Sherman Rose bush' for the table."

Mrs. Field goes on to tell that the senorita never liked that story of waiting for Gen. Sherman "till the roses bloom again." She said, and this was much later, of course, that she had only met the general at a ball and he danced with her as he did with other young girls of the village, but denied there was any love affair and protested in her pretty Spanish that she would never have given anybody such a silly promise.

"No one I have ever known could tell a story as well as Louis – and when we arrived in Monterey fresh from the trip and wrote about 'The Amateur Emigrant' his talk was fascinating," Mrs. Field wrote in the original manuscript for "This Life I've Loved."

"He would curl up on the sofa, smoking cigarettes, and we would all cluster round him – some of us on the floor at his feet – my mother, Nellie, her sister; Lloyd, my brother, and myself and sometimes Joe Strong and Adolfo Sanchez, and listen entranced.

"When he told of the man at the eating house on the railroad pushing his arm across him to reach a potato and saying 'Excuse my apparent rudeness!' he would act the part till we screamed with laughter. That came to be a by-word with us – when we took the last cake on the dish or pulled a cushion from under Louis' head, or snatched the newspaper. I never thought of him as an invalid – he was so gay, so full of vitality, his brown eyes sparking with fun and interest."

An amusing incident told by Mrs. Field in her manuscript, but not in her published book, concerned Stevenson's humor.

"One night I remember Joe Strong and Adolfo were waiting for us under the rose tree and Nellie and I passed through the room where my mother and Louis were sitting talking. Quite casually Louis began a story which arrested our attention. We lingered at the door, but the story went on growing more and more exciting till Louis paused to look at his watch. Nellie exclaimed, "'Oh, hurry up Louis what happened then?'

"'I don't know,' he said laughing, 'I just bet Fanny that I could keep those two young men waiting 10 minutes and it's 15!'"

At the invitation of a young rancher, Mrs. Osborne and her party were invited to attend a rodeo, the rounding up and branding of the cattle he owned. This was during their life at Senorita Bonifacio's home and before Fanny Osborne's marriage to Robert Louis Stevenson. Her daughter, Isobel Field, describes the preparation for a week long camping expedition to the ranch, their dress, the program and the food in her draft of the manuscript which later became a chapter called "Monterey."

"My mother made us 'bloomer suits' for the trip. They were an innovation and none of us would have dared to appear in them on the streets of Monterey, but they were very smart and appropriate for riding; loose full bloomers that fastened at the knees and over them a close fitting 'one-piece' dress buttoned down the front, with patch pockets, cuffs and collar of contrasting color. With these suits we wore woolen stockings, high laced boots and wide brimmed hats. Of course we rode sidesaddle.

"Our party consisted of my mother, looking younger than any of us, my little brother, Lloyd; Nellie, our host, Joe Strong and Adolfo Sanchez and myself, besides a number of Mexican vaqueros, who kept in a separate group.

"These vaqueros did some fancy riding for us. It was widely exciting to watch and a beautiful exhibition of skill. These same dashing young gentlemen were also excellent cooks, as we discovered around the camp fire at night, for it was then that we heard really beautiful singing; lovely old Spanish songs to the accompaniment of guitars. It was no wonder that Nellie and I came back engaged."