

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Letter From R.L.S.**

Robert Louis Stevenson, noted poet and author, a resident of Monterey for a short time in 1879, became so enamored with its beauty that he wrote a number of articles about the Peninsula during the time he spent here, including "The Old Pacific Capital." Today we have found one that probably has not been published outside the covers of the early Californian and The Herald.

During Stevenson's stay in Monterey he did a bit of writing for the Californian, without a by-line. On Nov. 6, 1879, he was asked by the publisher to journey to Mission Carmelo and write a story about San Carlos Day, which was to be celebrated that morning. He visited the mission and wrote the story in the form of a letter to the editor, addressing him as: "My Dear Bronson," and signing himself: "The Monterey Barbarian." The sight of the old and beautiful mission in ruins and the beauty of the impressive service so moved Stevenson that he wrote an appeal, probably the first of many future appeals, for its restoration.

"You have asked me to write something of what I saw on San Carlos Day and I comply herewith.

"I fancy everyone must play the part of a barbarian sometime or other in the course of his life, just as each, according to the proverb, must eat his peck of dust. We have a number of gentlemen here, all oddly enough, answering to the name of John; very courteous and obliging I find them.

Stevenson began his news story thusly on the doings at San Carlos Mission in Carmel on San Carlos Day in 1879.

"Well, sir, I went to Carmelo in a buggy from Wolters, over a road which would be an extravagant farce in the country from which I come," he continued. "I beheld a considerable concourse of people in their best, some firing guns, one standing up in a wagon and unweariedly beating a drum, just as though something were about to happen.

"I ate for the first time in my life (I began by saying I was a barbarian) some corn roasted in hot coals, for which I am indebted to the Rev. Mr. Murphy and washed down my repast with my part of two bottles of wine – one from Simoneau, and the other furnished, and I am bound to say, shared by Adolpho Sanchez. I am not the man (barbarian though I be) to draw comparisons; but I

bore myself, I hope, like one who does not fear a bottle and a glass, and I had no cause to regret my daring." After this description of the meal, Stevenson goes back to the man with the drum and writes: "All this touched me. I cannot remain unmoved when it comes to eating and drinking. But please, Bronson, why did that man beat that drum? I am on live coals, as the saying is, till I know what he had in view. It is pleasant, of course, to beat the drum; but people usually have some ulterior motive when they indulge publicly and hours together in that exercise. I dare say I should like to play the drum too; but then I should go off somewhere by myself in the desert, and have it out alone with my maker; I should not stand up in a wagon as if I were going to sell pills."

"Besides," Stevenson continued, "I marked that man, and he had something on his mind. Let us know in the next issue."

(To Be Continued)