

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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R. L. S. Spurred Mission Restoration

As we unfold this story of Robert Louis Stevenson's visit to Mission Carmelo on San Carlos Day, Nov. 6, 1879, as he wrote it for the Californian, Monterey's newspaper of that date, we must add a bit of proof of authorship.

Although the article, in the form of a letter to the editor, was signed a "Monterey Barbarian," it is strongly reminiscent of his "The Old Pacific Capital" which is published in Stevenson's essays. It is also a recorded fact that he did visit Carmel Mission on that date and he told a number of his friends that he was the author – the Barbarian.

John Shinabarger, a pioneer of California and the Peninsula, who passed away a number of years ago, wrote to The Herald on August 16, 1922: "There is no doubt about the authorship of the article on San Carlos Day's celebration, Nov. 6, 1879. He told me himself that he wrote it."

Shinabarger was then writing for the Salinas paper and was commissioned, he said by the editor, to see Stevenson and get the article or an authentic and signed copy of it for publication in Salinas and later to be included in a pamphlet of propaganda for general circulation, in an effort to raise funds for the restoration of the mission. "I met Father Casanova and we went to Stevenson," Shinabarger wrote, and he promised to do as we wished. I later came to Monterey and assumed charge of the Californian, for Senator Hill. I met Stevenson several times thereafter."

After his disposal of his thoughts about the man and his drum, Stevenson continued his letter to Bronson with these remarks:

"But sir, this is not the matter at hand. I made two remarks upon St. Charles Day and first; you have there a church of extreme interest which is going the way of all roofless and neglected buildings. Every year with summer drouth and winter rains is hurrying that church into the number of things that are no more.

"This speaking relic of the past! In England some great noble or cotton spinner would purchase it, repair it and charge so much entry money to the curious. In France, still better, the government would take it in hand and make it one of the "Historical Monuments" of the

nation. So piously, in these old countries, do people cherish what united them to the past.

"Here in America, on this beautiful coast, you cannot afford to lose what you have. When I think how that bell first sounded from that mission church among the Indians of Carmelo and the echoes of the hills of Monterey first learned the unaccustomed note, I am moved by sentiment, to pray for restitution or at least repair."

Then Stevenson looked ahead to what he thought might be true – he looked into the future we might say seventy-four years – the present day – and wrote: "And when I think how, as time goes on, visitors will flock to such a curiosity, as they flock to similar places in Europe by the hundred and the thousands, and how the managers of our hotels, present and future, may have cause to bless the man who puts a roof on the Carmel church. I see the merest business prudence should lead you and me, and all who take an interest in old Monterey, to do our little best for that good end."

(To Be Continued)