

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'The Bohemia'

"The Bohemia, one of the best known and most celebrated resorts in this city, has been removed from its old site on the Gomez block to the Sanchez corner of Franklin and Alvarado streets." This announcement appeared in an issue of the Monterey Cypress in 1891.

The Bohemia received its name in the day when the old capital was the field of action of numerous artists and literary men who had been attracted "hither to depict nature in her grandest form." It was while Jules Tavernier, Julian Rix, Stanton, Joe Strong, Charles Rollo Peters and many others went about, palette in hand, placing on canvas such scenery as Monterey could furnish. During those days The Bohemia was their meeting place. It was here that the boys would congregate and tell stories. The Sanchez brothers, the proprietors, assisted in making life merry with their musical talents.

Of those who gathered there in 1891, most of them scattered to the four winds of the earth, and as the Cypress editor wrote "some have gone to that undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveler returns."

Then an interesting paragraph relates: "Jules, unfortunate Jules, died in the Sandwich Islands. Of the others, the only one we hear from through the columns of the press is Robert L. Stevenson, the novelist, who is now gathering new thoughts among the South Sea Islands."

Jules Tavernier, the best known of all French painters of the early days in California, was born in Paris in 1844, studied at the Beaux Arts before coming to California and to Monterey where he had a studio in what is now known as the Stevenson House on Houston street. No other painter in his day in California commanded the prestige and the prices carried by his work, according to the statement made in the catalogue published in 1950 for the centennial exhibit of French art and other possessions of the French who settled in California from 1850 at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

Tavernier's studio was the rendezvous of artists and writers. He counted among his friends and benefactors Jules Simoneau, who helped Stevenson to life and fame

and his reputation has endured with art connoisseurs to this day. He died in Honolulu, May 18, 1889.

Another French artist in Monterey about the same time was Leon Troussset, about whom we have been able to learn very little, except for a few references to him in connection with the story of Jules Simoneau who befriended him on many occasions. There are only three paintings by Troussset known to exist in California; and two of these were exhibited at the French Centennial Exhibit. One was a watercolor titled "Founding of Monterey" and the other an oil "Moss Landing at Castroville," owned by Our Lady of Refuge Catholic Church, Castroville. Eight Taverniers were hung in the exhibit. Two came from Casa Soberanes, "Hilo" and "A Dream," and the other was a self portrait loaned by Mrs. Gregory Teaby.

Such were the men as visited the famous Bohemia, which for many years bore evidence of their skill in the shape of a beautiful but hurriedly drawn landscape or figure, here and there. The old counter had three pretty land pictures painted respectively by Stanton, Peters and Strong. On the door panels were figures drawn by various artists – including Tavernier and others equally famous. Time and poor varnish had their effect on some of these pictures but still some of them were easily recognized as works of art until the time when the old building was demolished to make room for progress.