

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Mrs. Stevenson's Diary

Several months ago, Charles Neider, a New York author, spent a few weeks on the Monterey Peninsula and while here visited our historic buildings. While spending an enjoyable hour or so in the Stevenson House on Houston street he became entranced with the original copy of the diary of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. which with other articles of Stevensonia had been presented to the State of California for the Stevenson House by Mrs. Isobel Field, Mrs. Stevenson's daughter.

He asked for and received permission from the Division of Beaches and Parks, the administrators of the California State Historical Monuments, to edit and publish the diary so all lovers of the famous poet and his family might enjoy reading delightful bits from the daily life of the Stevenson's, as recorded by Fannie Osbourne Stevenson.

While studying the book, written in the author's own handwriting, Neider came across several passages which had been purposely scratched out so laboriously and effectively that ever since the entries have been a mystery. With the permission of the commission, Mr. Neider took the book in which the diary had been written to the Huntington Library at San Marino where the mystery was dispelled by months of work that came to an interesting end in January of this year.

The library began the deciphering of the crossed-out passages in the diary by radiation photography facilities, which have solved other literary puzzles, plus handwriting analysis and deciphering by Charles Neider.

During Mrs. Stevenson's residence in Samoa, where the family went with the hope that the climate of the South Seas might be beneficial to the health of Robert Louis Stevenson, Mrs. Stevenson confided her feelings to the diary, but later she either changed her mind about the value of what she had written, or some member of her family did for her, and endeavored to destroy the information the notations contained.

It was in 1890 that the Stevenson's went to Samoa from San Francisco. accompanied by Mrs. Stevenson's two children, Lloyd and Isobel Osbourne. Lloyd to whom Stevenson dedicated "Treasure Island," became an author in his own right. He died in Glendale, California, in 1947. Isobel became the wife of Joe Strong, an old

time Monterey artist and their son, Austin Strong, the playwright, died on the East Coast about four years ago. Mrs. Field (Isobel) Strong Field died in Santa Barbara in 1953. It was she who gave the diary to the State along with furniture, manuscripts, first editions and pictures to the Stevenson House.

Mrs. Stevenson's journal contains 20 pages in a bound notebook covering the years from 1890 to 1893. There are 21 obliterated passages on 18 pages. They had been written in various inks and scratched out with others it is interesting to note.

The reporter from the Huntington Library writes that Erwin F. Morkisch made hundreds of photographs of the enigmatic sections, sometimes using infrared and sometimes ultra-violet to disentangle the penmanship. In addition, Mr. Neider had to puzzle over a lot of personalized shorthand. We had the pleasure of talking with Mr. Neider and watching his work a number of times during his visits to the Stevenson House. We even tried to use our poor eyesight to make out words, then experimented with a strong magnifying glass, but to no avail. But it was fun!

We will not relate the discovery of the secrets of Mrs. Stevenson as revealed in the work of the Huntington Library, but leave that to Mr. Neider as he tells it in the book which will soon be off the presses and prove of interest to Monterey and collectors alike.