

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Stevenson House**

Gifts worth many thousands of dollars have come to the Stevenson House recently. Notable is an elegant Empire sofa upholstered in blue. More than 150 years old, a gift to the State from Dr. and Mrs. L. A. Williams, lately of Carmel Valley. The handsome antique was owned by one generation after another of the Pemberton family of Massachusetts. In a letter accompanying the gift, Mrs. Williams wrote as follows:

"The sofa sat in the front hall of Cousin Ella's story and a half house, and tradition has it that in case of a thunder storm Cousin Ella would repair to the hall and sit on the sofa until the storm passed, because there was no metal in it. I might add that Cousin Ella was never struck by lightning but died peacefully and properly in her bed."

The sofa now stands between two western windows of the Stevenson House back parlor, beside another gift from the Williamses, a rosewood Boston rocker in green plush, which belonged to Dr. Williams' maternal great grandmother in 1800 or thereabouts. Both pieces were originally upholstered in horsehair.

In the R. L. S. bedroom adjoining the back parlor is a piece of furniture directly associated with Robert Louis Stevenson. This is a dark mahogany bed of unusual pattern purchased by the famous author in France two or three years after the period he spent in Monterey. It might be called a low-cut four poster, the short posts tapering upward to form pointed octagonal knobs.

This bed is but one of the valuable association items donated to the State in June by Mrs. Ethel Osbourne, second wife of the late Lloyd Osbourne. Stevenson's stepson. Several other large pieces of furniture, as well as many smaller and more personal belongings, are included in the Osbourne collection. There is a light finished mahogany dining table, inherited from Stevenson's parents, and kept polished like a mirror, which stretches to 14 feet. The sideboard is by Sheraton and matches the Sheraton chairs previously given the Stevenson House from the late Isobel Field collection.

The eight chairs that came with the dining table have their original leather seats. Last of the large pieces of furniture is the massively carved oaken chest or cabinet now to be seen in a corner of the Gonzalez sala

downstairs in the Stevenson House - and also on a photograph of Stevenson's living room in Samoa, where he settled for health reasons in 1890.

The cabinet dates back to 1634 and was a valuable antique even in the days of Stevenson's parents who acquired it and passed it on to their famous only son, whose wife brought it to California after his death.

The previously mentioned dining table has an association with Stevenson's funeral. When the great writer died suddenly of a massive cerebral hemorrhage, Dec. 3, 1894, his family realized poignantly what it meant to live in the Samoan wilderness. There were no undertakers on their island.

With the help of devoted native retainers, the family laid out the body on the dining room table while a wooden coffin was being fashioned. When the coffin was placed on the table, one corner dragged and gouged out several deep scratches. These scratches on the table are pointed out today by Mrs. Anne Issler, the curator at the Stevenson House, "when," she says, "visitors show special interest in R.L.S."

Among the Osbourne association items other than furniture are several personal possessions of Stevenson also dating from the six years he spent in the South Seas. There are the spurs he shared with his horse Jack, the binoculars he used on his several cruises, his silver tobacco box, a worn leather coin purse containing a key of mystery, a brass bell used on the dining table to summon native servants, a pink conch shell also used to summon the servants, a chest of three-generation sliver, a glass goblet of antique Venetian glass, and a trophy honoring his father, Thomas Stevenson, for his inventions as a lighthouse engineer.

Of the greatest literary interest are 18 woodcuts from the famous Davos Press, and one of the tiny woodblocks carved by Stevenson with which he and Lloyd Osbourne, then a boy of thirteen, made the cuts for the "toy" Davos books in 1881.