

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 17, 1959

### **About Old Dolls**

The Stevenson House on Houston, street in Monterey is most famous for its valuable and unusual collection of Stevensoniana, but there is another collection which is of interest to the younger generation and to their elders alike.

It is an unusual collection of dolls, dolls furniture and children's toys, which have been given to the Monterey History and Art Assn. by many people who are interested in the preservation of treasures of the past and to share them with others. The dolls are on loan to the Children's Room in the Stevenson House which is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Thursday.

The latest addition to this special display is a beautiful big doll of the gay 90s period in San Francisco. It was the treasured possession of Jessie Morrison who became Mrs. Jessie Knupp and who now resides on McClellan Street in New Monterey.

With this doll Mrs. Knupp gave the pieces of the original dress worn by "La Estralita" (Little Star) who was her pride and joy for many years. The long baby dress she now wears was Mrs. Knupp's father's christening dress. Of course, Estralita is a blonde with blue eyes, a kid body and a china face. She is a dear, I declare!

Now for the story of this doll's beginning. This story accompanied her when she made her debut at the monthly meeting of the board of directors of the Monterey History and Art Assn. July 7, Monterey's 113th anniversary of the raising of the United States flag at the Custom House by order of Commodore John Drake Sloat.

In a San Francisco newspaper in 1897 there appeared a social report of an event which took place in the old Palace Hotel. The event, of all things, was a doll show sponsored by the Doctors' Daughters. It vied with the University of California-Stanford football game. Which event won in point of attendance is not recorded, merely the fact the social center was the doll show.

Days in advance, columns about it filled the papers, and every modiste and shop in the city entered dolls, in addition to those given by individuals. Our Estralita was one of the favorites.

No less a person than the late James D. Phelan helped auction them off in the evening, and there were hundreds of names listed among the social registerites who "thronged" to see the exhibit, and to buy. And that was the "gay nineties," which caused one smart descendant of an official of the Doctors Daughters to enquire, "what do you mean - gay?"

The Doll Show was an occasion of much dining and dancing, and not even the excitement of the football game overshadowed its importance. Miss Jennie Blair was secretary for the group and presided at the grab bag during the show. Mrs. Samuel Knight was entertainment chairman. The late T. T. Williams sold dolls right and left for \$100 each. The late New Greenway sent a case of champagne for the punch bowl.

And as the newspaper article reported: "There was one doll dressed as a bride in duchess lace and a pearl embroidered bodice, which caused one of the guests attending to report:

"Young maids stood and sighed over it, and young matrons nodded at it, and older matrons sighed over it. And oh me, oh my, the bridesmaids were dreams. There was one in white chiffon, and that was such a dear little frock, such a young, modest, innocent little frock, fresh hearted, and entirely loveable.

"But my blue ribbon would have gone to a doll in faint green satin, with a fluff of white chiffon at the feet, a caress of soft otter at the breast, and a certain delicate mystery of moonlight about it everywhere." This prodigy of fashion was brought by Mrs. Williams for \$100.

So, instead of the Junior League fashion shows, the dolls were models for the latest modes, going later to the nurseries of the future belles of the social set. The Palace was packed for three days and two evenings with "society dowagers, its daughters and its gilded sons," in the quaint patter of the time.

Our readers, and nonreaders, are invited to go to the Stevenson House any day except Thursday, when they will be welcomed by Mrs. Anne Issler, the curator, and told to enjoy the House and the exhibit it contains.