

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Compiling Letters By Stevenson**

An important visitor, Bradford Booth, PhD, of Westwood, Los Angeles, spent several days in Monterey recently with the express purpose of studying the Stevensoniana in the Stevenson House on Houston street. He made two trips up the coast, spending one day and then two days checking dates and studying the scrapbooks kept by Stevenson's mother who meticulously saved clippings, of all the printed reviews of her son's writing and filed them in a scrapbook which now is treasured in the vault at the adobe house in which he stayed during his visit to Monterey in 1879-'80.

Dr. Booth had had some correspondence with Mrs. Anne Issier, the curator of the Stevenson House. She is also a student of Stevensoniana having written two books on Stevenson's California period. "Our Mountain Hermitage" and "Happier for His Presence," published by the Stanford Press. So, the two admirers of this well-known writer had an interesting time comparing notes.

Dr. Booth is a professor of English at UCLA. As one interviewer wrote:

This 51-year-old Harvard-educated savant is currently engaged in what is perhaps one of the most exciting and painstaking literary detective jobs ever undertaken.

"It's a ten-year-long effort to compile and edit the complete letters of Robert Louis Stevenson — an editorial task of such acknowledged magnitude that few editors would think of tackling alone."

It means of course not only collecting and transcribing the voluminous correspondence, of the world-famous author of "Treasure Island" and "Kidnaped," but also clearing up thousands of obscure references Stevenson made in his letters to people about places and fictional characters in his life.

Dr. Booth said that when completed, the work will comprise six or seven large volumes. He began the work six years ago. With the help of the Guggenheim Foundation, which recently decided to subsidize part of his research abroad, Dr. Booth hopes to complete the job under the ten-year deadline which he set for himself.

Dr. Booth will leave California in April and spend a year in England and Scotland, Stevenson's birthplace, pouring over many of the 2,600 letters the author wrote in his brief span of life — "so much of which he spent traveling from one place to another seeking a climate agreeable to his tuberculosis-wracked body."

Dr. Booth relates: "I thought I should never be able to understand Stevenson's handwriting, let alone edit his letters. Stevenson's handwriting during his last years became very bad because of his arthritis, indeed, during the last two years of his life he had to hire a secretary. Now I can read easily what once was completely baffling to me."

"It is one thing though, to have learned how to decipher the author's hand; it is quite another to have the letters to decipher." Dr. Booth concedes that most of Stevenson's letters are in three collections now readily available to him: one in the Yale Library and another in the National Library in Scotland and the small but valuable collection in the Stevenson House here in Monterey.