

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 14, 1961

A Tent In Carmel

The first entry in George Sterling's Carmel Diary is not at all exciting according to the records in the Bancroft Library at the University of California: "June 30th, 1905. Arrived at Carmel, George Sterling, W. E. Wood, R. L. Partington. Fine weather. Put up small tent."

In this modest way, Sterling came to the little town of Carmel, the date that really marked its beginning as an artists' colony. Others followed; writers and painters, such as Mary Austin, Jimmy Hopper, Fred Bechdolt, Arnold Genthe, Perry Newberry, Alice MacGowan Cooke, Harry Leon Wilson, Nora May French, Sinclair Lewis, Michael Williams, and Upton Sinclair, to name but a few.

Long dissatisfied with earning a living as a clerk in an Oakland realty office of his uncle, Frank C. Havens, Sterling wanted, to devote full time to writing poetry. He had already been taught to love Monterey by Charles Warren Stoddard and Charles Rollo Peters and he claimed it was Peters who inspired the thought of moving to Carmel.

From the time he arrived until his departure until his departure from Carmel in November 1913, Sterling kept a diary, and this diary, in six notebooks, is part of a recent gift to the Bancroft Library by Mrs. John Francis Neylan. Pictured in these notebooks is the charm of the simple and carefree existence 'of these gifted people amid the natural beauties of the Monterey Peninsula, which was yet unmarred by the great influx of tourists.

In those days, a four-horse stage brought visitors and mail over from Monterey to Cannel, and visitors were many - Jack London, Xavier Martinez, Will Irwin, Gelett Burgess, the Partingtons and though only once, Ambrose Bierce. The life was informal, the atmosphere unhurried. There were long walks to Point Lobos, the expeditions for mushrooms on the 17-Mile Drive, the "muscatel symposiums" around campfires and around the huge fireplace in Sterling cottage, the mussel-bakes and barbecues, the "rags" in town and in Monterey, swimming in the Carmel River, the moonlight walks. Living was inexpensive when one could gather mussels and abalone from the rocks on the coast, raise vegetables and hunt rabbits, quail and ducks. "This is a fine place for cheap grub," wrote Sterling' one day after

he had found several abalone, shot three rabbits and bought salmon for twenty-five cents.

The influence Carmel exerted on Sterling's poetry was indeed great, and it was more than appropriate that the period he lived there coincided with his rise to fame. In the words of one critic, ". . . If you subtracted the inspiration of Carmel from his published volumes, you would take away much of his most significant work."

The Monterey County Historical Society will meet for an annual banquet at 7 p.m. in the Jeffery Hotel in Salinas on Saturday, April 15. Rev. Geiger, noted authority on California History will come from Santa Barbara Mission to be the principal speaker. New officers will be installed.