

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Robert Louis Stevenson

It warms the cockles of one's heart when two letters come in one day with compliments and thanks for something accomplished just for the joy of doing it and the hope that the act might bring happiness to others. We recently wrote three articles about the life of Robert Louis Stevenson in California from information given us by other friends. Now three more have come back with more delightful information on Stevenson, Mount St. Helena, the Silverado Squatters, and a bit about the famous writer's stay in Hawaii.

J. William MacLennan of Carmel has contributed this bit to the Diary:

"There remains but few mementoes in Hawaii of Stevenson's visit there; a grass hut; a plaque once attached to a banyan tree in the shade of which he often met the little Princess Kaiulani, then a charming maid of thirteen years and her portrait hanging in the Princess Kaiulani hotel."

Stevenson arrived in Honolulu in 1898 with his wife and his mother. Treasure Island and the Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, had already made him famous and he was greeted at the wharf by a host of people. Among them were his stepdaughter, Isohel, and her husband, Joe Strong. Joe had been commissioned by John Spreckels to paint a number of island landscapes.

"The Stevensons were welcomed into the Royal party," continues Mr. MacLennan. "King Kala-kaua gave a luau in his honor, and there Stevenson had his first taste of baked dog, raw fish and live shrimps. The King and Stevenson became close friends. The King helped him learn the Hawaiian language and they enjoyed talking over the myths and legends of the islands.

"During his five months stay in Hawaii Stevenson lived most of this time in the Brown House at Waikiki and used as his workshop a grass hut on the grounds. This was furnished with two couches, three chairs, and two tables usually covered with books, manuscripts, and letters. Dwelling in its far corners were several friendly mice, and they often ventured out unafraid, often sharing his meals, as he lay wilting, pajama clad on one of the couches.

"Wherever Stevenson wandered, he went notebook in hand, jotting down any material he thought he could

use. Along the Honolulu waterfront, he gathered many stories (facts and fiction), of shipwrecks, pirates, opium runners and blackbirders (slave runners), and much of this material he incorporated in *The Wrecker*. Another of his stories, *The Bottle Imp*, was based on tales he heard during a visit to the Kona Coast on the Island of Hawaii."

King Kalakaua wanted Stevenson to make his home in Oahu, but he felt the need of a warmer climate and left in October for Samoa. He did not return until 1903, five years later. By this time, he was rapidly falling in health, contracted pneumonia, and had to spend the most of his time in bed at the Sans Souci Hotel. He did not linger in Honolulu for Hawaii was not the same as formerly. King Kalakaua was dead and the monarchy had been abolished. The little Princess had also died in Scotland where the chill winds were too much for her.

"Stevenson missed her:

"The Island Maid, the Island Rose ...

Light of heart and bright of face ...

And I in her dear banyan shade

Look vainly for my little maid.

"The banyan tree is gone, the plaque once attached to it is now in the Robert Louis Stevenson School in Honolulu. And the grass hut in which he finished the *Master of Ballantree* was sold at one time to a Chinese who planned to use it as a chicken house but was rescued by a member of the staff of the Salvation Army, and now adorns its "Tea House Garden" in Monoa Valley."