

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 9, 1963

The Fine Robert L. Stevenson Collection

"In this house in the year 1879 lived Robert Louis Stevenson, essayist, storyteller and poet, whose contributions to literature delight the world."

This simple bronze tablet bearing the foregoing legend was unveiled on Nov. 26, 1932, at the old white adobe house on Houston street in Monterey where Stevenson lived for a time and wrote when not "playing chess and discussing the universe," with his old friend Jules Simoneau. Stevenson often said, "Simoneau personified to him the charm of the Old Pacific Capital."

It was Simoneau's daughter, Mrs. Thomas Fussell who drew aside the American and British flags to reveal the marker following an introductory address by the Late William C. Van Antwerp, according to the accounts published at that time. The address had been prepared by Mayor John P. Sandholdt, who because of illness had not been able to be present. The brief ceremony was concluded by Floden W. Heron of the Literary Anniversary Club, sponsors of the occasion.

It was Mr. Heron who later presented his valuable and large collection of Stevenson's writings, documents, first editions, pictures, etc., to the State of California to be permanently displayed at the Stevenson House. The collection arrived and was cataloged and arranged for the pleasure of the guests before the observance of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Stevenson.

Others represented on the memorable day in 1932 were Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Rothchild, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Weller, all of San Francisco, in addition to Mrs. Tobin Clark and the late Mrs. Edith van Antwerp, the two women who are credited with having preserved the Stevenson House as a memorial "To the literary and personal charm of the great teller-of-tales."

Included in the group of Peninsula residents present on that date was the late Edward Berwick of Pacific Grove, who knew Stevenson personally. To Berwick the speakers paid tribute as one of those who had befriended the ill and near-penniless young writer while he was a sojourner in Monterey.

The next day, Gellert Burgess was the speaker at the 100th anniversary observance. Mr. Burgess had been a friend of the Stevenson and Strong family for many years. It was Burgess who designed the tomb and the

lettering for the marker on Stevenson's grave on the top of a mountain in Samoa, where RLS died in 1894, 69 years ago. Burgess is the author of "The Purple Cow", which most everyone remembers him by, and many other tales. He lived in Monterey and Carmel off and on for many years until his death a number of years ago.

Following the dedication of the plaque, Mr. Rothchild had printed 10 copies of a booklet which he presented to members of the literary club. Proof sheets of the speech prepared by Mayor Sandholdt and the address given by Floden W. Heron, speaking for the club, are included in the scrapbook kept by Mr. Heron and now in the Stevenson House collection.

It was in 1941 that Col. Roger S. Fitch, president of the Monterey History and Art Assn. was appealed to by Mrs. Clark and Mrs. van Antwerp to act as intermediary between themselves and the State of California in their desire to present the Stevenson House to the State of California that it might be forever preserved and open to the interested public. It was accepted and has been restored and now houses what is thought to be one of the finest collections of Stevenson's works and other mementos in existence.

The above article was inspired by the postcard received from Mr. and Mrs. Donald Craig and posted in Glasgow, Scotland, just a few days ago.

"Although Scotland has many links with Monterey – historically and otherwise – Stevenson is the only one to have a museum dedicated to him in both cities. As a matter of fact, we have a larger and better memorial to him than here in his birthplace. We have been in Scotland for three weeks and have loved every moment."

Allen Knight, vice president of the Monterey History and Art Assn. told a group of friends a few evenings ago, that while on a South Seas trip he climbed the mountain at Vallima, Samoa, to see the tomb of Robert Louis Stevenson and to read the "Requiem." This what he read:

"Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig a grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I lay me down with a will.

This be the verse you gave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home, home from the hill."

For Mrs. Stevenson the tiger lily and the lines from "My Wife."

"Teacher, tender comrade, wife,
A fellow-farer true through life.
Heart whole and soul free.
The august Father gave to me."