

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Pre-1914 Carmel

The Book Club of California announces as its spring publication for 1966 "The Seacoast of Bohemia," an account of early Carmel by Franklin Walker which will prove entertaining to old timers as well as newcomers.

In June 1905, George Sterling wrote to Ambrose Bierce:

"In Carmel-by-the-Sea I will be able to live naturally and quietly." So thought the first member of the literary colony to settle in Carmel under the invitation of culturally - oriented real estate developers J. F. Devendorf and Frank Powers.

Sterling hoped to live off the chicken and potatoes he would raise, supplemented by the abalone, deer and other bounties wild nature would provide. His enthusiasm for the new Walden soon brought the eccentric novelist Mary Austin and the distinguished art photographer Arnold Genthe.

Sterling found in time that strolls in the pine woods, surf fishing and beach parties did not constitute all the activities fostered in Carmel.

Red wine gave way to stronger waters when Charles Stoddard and Joaquin Miller came to town; when Jack and Charmian London arrived (with two Japanese servants), partying continued day and night. When Nora May French, a promising young poet, killed herself in the Sterling cabin, a dark pall fell over the revels.

Walker, author of "San Francisco's Literary Frontier" and other outstanding works in the field of Western letters, tells the story of this unusual colony from 1905 until the beginning of the First World War. He draws much of his material from letters and diaries previously untapped.

When Robinson Jeffers reached Carmel in the spring of 1914, he found only a pagan altar, in the midst of a natural amphitheater of pines decorated with animal skulls to remind him of Carmel's most ardent devotee.

Between the time Sterling invented the Abalone Song and Jeffers' arrival in the country to which he could give a "morbid fame," many activities occupied the attention of the writers and artists who lived between the rugged Santa Lucias and the white Carmel sands.

The Socialist fugitives from New Jersey's Helicon Hall came in search of Utopia, with Upton Sinclair living on tomatoes and nuts, writes Franklin Walker.

Sinclair Lewis, not yet a novelist, sold plots to Jack London and fell in love with Helen Cooke. The fair Helen flirted with "Hal" Lewis as well as his friend "Bill" Benet; but she married Harry Leon Wilson, a newcomer, who was about to create "Bunker Bean", "Ma Pettengill" and "Merton of the Movies."

Ambrose Bierce finally paid his long - delayed visit and proved himself an over - fastidious martinet. The Forest Theater was started, with feuds between actors and directors breaking out almost at once. In the long run it proved to be difficult to live naturally and at the same time quietly in Carmel.

The above review is taken largely from the material sent out by the Book Club to its members.

"Seacoast Of Bohemia" is illustrated extensively with informal photographs. It will be issued in an edition of 500 copies designed by Jack Werner Stauffacher, who recently reopened his Greenwood Press in San Francisco.

The book contains 144 pages, 9 1/2 by 7 inches in size and bound in decorative paperboard. The price is \$18 plus 72 cents sales tax to California residents.