

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Spectacle of Greatness**

"The Bay of Monterey has been compared by no less a person than General Sherman to a bent fishing hook; and the comparison, if less important than the march through Georgia, still shows the eye of a soldier for topography," writes Robert Louis Stevenson in his description of Monterey when he lived here for a short time in 1879.

Stevenson continues: "Santa Cruz sets exposed at the shank; the mouth of the Salinas River is at the middle of the bend; and Monterey itself is cosily ensconced beside the barb. Thus the ancient capital of California faces across the bay, while the Pacific Ocean, though hidden by low hills and forests, bombards her left flank and rear with never-dying-surf.

"In front of the town, the long line of beach trends north and northwest, and then westward to enclose the bay. The waves which lap so quietly about the jetties of Monterey grow louder and larger in the distance; you can see the breakers leaping higher and white by day; at night, the outline of the shore is traced in transparent silver by the moonlight and the flying foam; and from all weather, the low, distant, thrilling roar of the Pacific hangs over the coast and the adjacent country like smoke above a battle."

"The waves come in slowly vast and green, curve their translucent necks, and burst with a surprising uproar, that runs, waxing and waning, up and down the long key-board of the beach.

"The foam of these great ruins mounts in an instant to the ridge of the sand glacis, swiftly fleets back again, and is met and buried by the next breaker. The interest is perpetually fresh.

"On no other coast that I know shall you enjoy, in calm, sunny weather, Such a spectacle of ocean's greatness, such beauty of changing color, or such degrees of thunder. The very air is more than usually salt by this Homeris deep.

"The one common note of this country is the haunting presence of the ocean. A great faint sound of breakers follows you high up into the inland canyons; the roar of water dwells in the clean, empty rooms of Monterey as in a shell upon the chimney; go where you will, you have but to pause and listen to the voice of the Pacific.

"You pass out of town to the southwest and mount the hill among pine woods. Glade, thicket, and grove surround you.

"You see a deer; a multitude of quail arises. But the sound of the sea still follows you as you advance, like that of wind among the trees, only harsher and stranger to the ear; and when at length you gain the summit, out breaks on every hand and with frightened vigor, that same mending, distant, whispering rumble, of the ocean; for now you are on top of the Monterey Peninsula, and the noise no longer mounts to you from behind along the beach toward Santa Cruz. . ."