

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Christening Shawl of RLS

One of the prize possessions in the Stevenson House in Monterey is the christening shawl of Robert Louis Stevenson. It was the gift of John Howell, San Francisco's well known book dealer. He acquired it from a previous owner and sent it to Monterey to be added to the rapidly growing collection of Stevensoniana in the old adobe building on Houston street, now an historical State monument.

The original flannel shawl was used at the christening of RLS born November 13, 1850 and christened a few days later, according to the note sent with the gift.

It is white, with his initials embroidered in one corner. A statement signed by the previous owner states that the scarf was made and embroidered by Stevenson's nurse, a Mrs. Balfour, of Covington Manse, Edinburgh, Scotland. She gave it to a relative, Sarah Bigwood, age 14, to make a doll's mantle. She died in London, April 2, 1918, at the age of 82 years.

Mr. Crosslands, an officer of the first Life Guards Regiment, obtained the scarf in 1897, came to America after the Queen's Jubilee, thence to British Columbia and Australia. Later Sgt. Robert McIntoch was the owner of the scarf in San Francisco. He traded it to Frank Lewis Girard in September 1921 and Girard sold it to John Howell. The latter then gave it to the Stevenson House in Monterey, that all visitors to the old historical adobe might enjoy seeing it.

Isabel Field, stepdaughter of Robert Louis Stevenson, told this tale once while she was in Monterey on a visit: "There was difficulty between RLS and his father, especially on religious subjects. The senior Stevenson was a strict Scotch Presbyterian, RLS a liberal. In the elder Stevenson's home on Sundays only the Bible and sermons were permitted to be read.

Fanny Stevenson managed to break this down when she and Louis were visiting his parents. His father was getting old, could read only a few minutes at a time, and enjoyed being read to. One Saturday evening Fanny read to him Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain. She stopped at a critical, very interesting place and hid the book.

Sunday afternoon, she noticed her father-in-law was restless, turning up papers, and reaching into the

bookcases. Finally, he said to her, with a guilty smile, "Where's that book? I'd like to hear more about Tom."

Fanny easily found the book and for the next hour the old gentleman was enjoying the exploits of Tom. The following Sunday after church services, he was riding with Huckleberry Finn on a raft down the Mississippi. Then followed the "Leather Stocking Tales" by James Fenimore Cooper, and Sundays became a happier day in the Stevenson household.