



Robert Louis Stevenson Club of Monterey



Celebrating the life and works of RLS since 1994

In this issue

Event Highlights to Date

- June Salon.....p. 2
- RLS Club at Carmel Mission
.....p. 2-4
- Annual Meeting.....p. 4-5
- Unbirthday Celebration.....p.5-6
- .Book Reviews.....p. 7-8

No President's Message for this issue but please enjoy the picture and articles for our club events over the past 6 months!



Annual meeting at Black Bear Diner

Calendar of Coming Events Dates and Time subject to change- updates will be emailed

Dec. 12-13 Christmas in the Adobes
Feb. 21 10 am, Zoom Salon Stories
in Samoa
March- tentative Winery visit
May- Wedding anniversary tea

Stay tuned via email for updates
and postings on RLS Club website

How to communicate with the RLS Club?

Please send an email to
rlsclubmonterey@outlook.com

<https://rlsclubmonterey.org/>



Unbirthday Event at Monterey Public Library

Event Highlights to date- June 2025-December 2025

Zoom Salon - June 14th - *Silverado Squatters*

The RLS Club hosted a fascinating salon discussing *The Silverado Squatters*, Robert Louis Stevenson's memoir of his honeymoon. He and his bride, Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson, left San Francisco on May 22, 1880, for the Napa Valley. Stevenson kept a detailed journal of their experiences and used it as a basis for an essay published in 1883.

Roger Swearingen of the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum in Saint Helena contributed valuable information about the Napa Valley and insights into RLS's activities there. He also provided historical photos and described the historical context of local transportation, trade and industry at the time.

The group noted the conversational tone of this travel writing, very different from his literary works. His lyrical descriptions of the landscape and the bright stars and creeping fog of the atmosphere painted a vivid image of their surroundings. His comments on the rather melodramatic characters of *Silverado* are unforgettable.

A topic of considerable discussion was the primitive conditions the couple experienced. The *Silverado* area had been a center for mining cinnabar for mercury, but these operations were quickly abandoned, and buildings were often moved or dismantled. It was in an isolated, abandoned bunkhouse that RLS and Fanny camped out for two months. Fanny adapted quickly to the rugged environment, harking back to her earlier life in Nevada mining camps. Of particular interest was the description of the complex situation involving mining claims, land ownership and squatters—such as RLS and Fanny.

This relatively brief essay provided an excursion into a little-known part of California history, insights into the relationship of RLS and Fanny, and increased familiarity of his travel writings. Visit our website for the recording of the *Silverado Squatters* Zoom Salon: <https://rlsclubmonterey.org/rls-salon-hour/>. The essay itself can be accessed at: (<https://robert-louis-stevenson.org/works/the-silverado-squatters-1884/>). This RLS book and others are available to members through our lending library. Feel free to contact our Librarian: **Ruth Anne Krotzer** at rkrtzercolts@gmail.com or Phone (831) 601-1894.

RLS Club visit to the Mission San Carlos de Borromeo del Rio Carmelo- August 30, 2025

On August 30th, 2025, twenty club members and friends gathered at the Carmel Mission which was founded in 1770 by Father Junipero Serra. When Serra died, in 1784, he was interred in the church at the base of the altar. All missions in California were secularized by the Mexican government in the 1830's and the adobe buildings deteriorated quickly and only the walls of the stone church survived. No village of Carmel existed then and the Mission lay abandoned some 5 miles south of Monterey.



RLS Club Members awaiting entry



Continued on p. 3

Our club members gathered to step back in time, to November 1879 when RLS visited, and to look at the Carmel Mission through his eyes. RLS arrived in Monterey at the end of August of that year when Monterey still looked and felt like a sleepy little Mexican town where the many fiestas, fandangos and religious celebrations were an important part of life. Every opportunity was taken to celebrate. The feast day of San Carlos de Borromeo falls on November 4th. As he is the patron saint of the Carmel mission it was an occasion to celebrate and RLS joined a lively contingent who followed the padre over the hill from Monterey to the abandoned Spanish mission where the priest would hold the only mass of the year. RLS described the whole event, including the native congregation, and the condition of the church touchingly in *The Old Pacific Capital*.

Our group made its way through the beautifully restored church and, to give a wedding party room on their big day, we gathered at the Munras Museum. This is a wonderful, little visited treasure on the mission grounds. The short film at the museum gave us great visual context of what Monterey looked like when RLS was here.

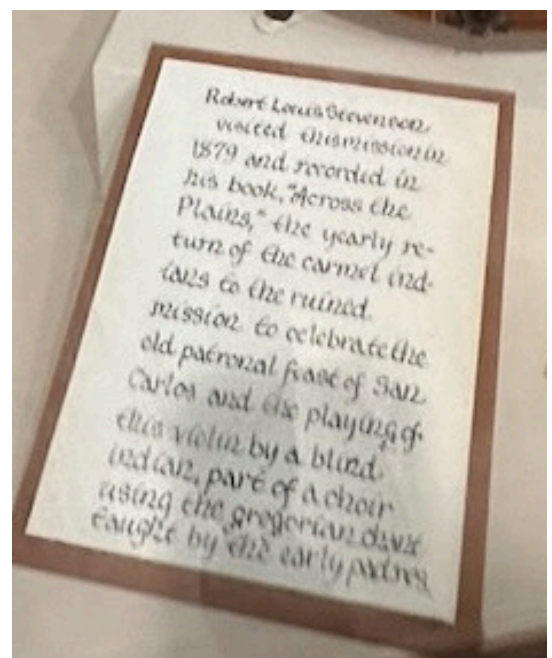
Picture of the mission in 1879



The restored chapel today



RLS Club members in Munras Museum



Signage noting RLS's visit to mission in museum



Club discussion in the courtyard

Today a housing development obscures the view of the river and the lagoon which was likely full of water and must have looked like a lake. In RLS' day the view extended across Carmel Bay to Point Lobos. From the Mission a cattle trail went south to the wilderness of the steep Big Sur country, an area which sadly RLS did not explore. I am sure he would have been inspired, just as John Steinbeck and Robinson Jeffers drew powerful material for their stories from that land.

We know that RLS wrote a few pieces for the local newspaper. His experience was published as San Carlos Day in the Californian under the pseudonym "The Monterey Barbarian". **Mimi Sheridan** read that recollection aloud. She also brought beautiful copies of the article to share.

In 1880, maybe prodded by the RLS article, or more likely by the slow trickle of tourists who ventured forth from the brand new Hotel Del Monte in Monterey along the now famous 17 Mile Drive, a fund was started to reroof the old church. By 1984 the dirt had been cleared out of the interior. Questions circulated about Father Junipero Serra's crypt, and if he was truly interred at the foot of the altar. This was put to rest on the 100th anniversary of his passing. People came from far and wide to witness the opening of the crypt and the remains of Serra were authenticated, partly through a piece of his purple silk stole which had been buried with him. That piece of fabric is exhibited today in the Mission museum. As fate would often have it one of our newer members, Scott Gale, shared a wonderful piece of related history. While looking through the archives of the Monterey History and Art association he discovered a manuscript about RLS written by Laura Bride Powers (see article in this newsletter, p.7). Scott found that in 1884, at 15 years old, Laura was one of the spectators present when the crypt was opened. I wonder if that experience helped spark her lifelong interest in California history. It is amazing how our interest in "all things RLS" connects us over the decades.

Annual Meeting at Black Bear Diner- Oct. 11, 2025

Talofa! We were pleased that our Samoan members, the **Maaolas'** attended our October 11th luncheon at the Black Bear Diner! Lui eloquently and authoritatively described the restored Vailima house as seen during his and Vesi's past tours. Various pictures were shown of the interior and exterior of the house. He highly recommended taking the Mt. Vaea 1,549 foot steep climb to see the RLS and Fanny graves, on a day without muddy walking trails. The summit view of Apia, the ocean, and the mountains, are worth one's effort. Next, Lui read an appropriate RLS Prayer written at Vailima entitled, "For Friends".

In the mission courtyard, **Monica Hudson** shared a number of large historic photos, including the roofless Mission church with the sacristy partly covered, and some of the inside and outside of the church dated to various years post secularization. These, and photos of the "melted" adobe outbuildings allowed us to compare the present and the past. It gave us a clear understanding of what RLS so vividly described. Painter Joe Strong, his friend and future stepson in law, had accompanied him; Joe captured the interior of the ruined church and the participants in that mass in a painting. We had a copy of his depiction which shows the church's interior almost identical to the existing historic photos.



Lou Maala, guest speaker

Continued on p. 5

Our following speaker was **Ruth Anne Krotzer** who presented highlights of Austin Strong; the step-grandson of RLS, and son of Joe and Isobel Strong. Of great importance to the RLS Club was recognizing our member **Carolyn Adamson** (Austin's relation), even though she and her husband were unable to attend.

Several enlargements were shown of Austin and his wife Mary, and Austin as the Commodore of the Nantucket Mass. Yacht Club, and Nantucket Wharf Rat Club (a social club). On display were copies of artwork by Austin in the 1940s. Austin probably had a natural inclination for painting due as both his parents and Grandmother Fanny were gifted artisans. (Don't miss seeing Joe Strong's and Fanny Stevenson's splendid art located at the RLS Adobe, Monterey). Austin was a celebrated playwright on Broadway in the early 20th century, such as "Seventh Heaven" starring Jimmy Stewart in 1937 and many others.



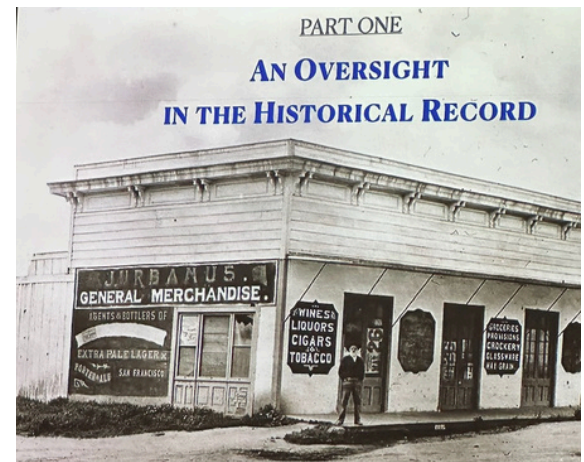
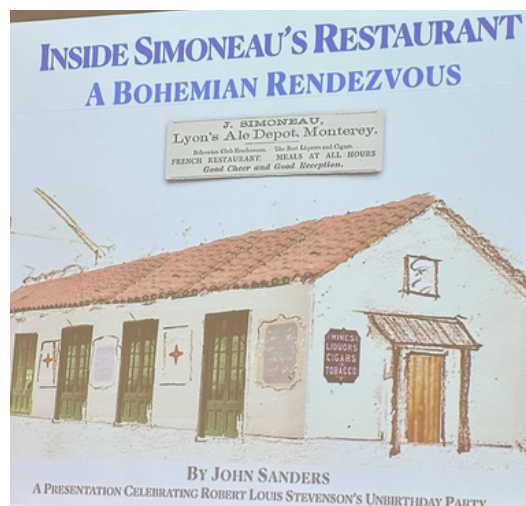
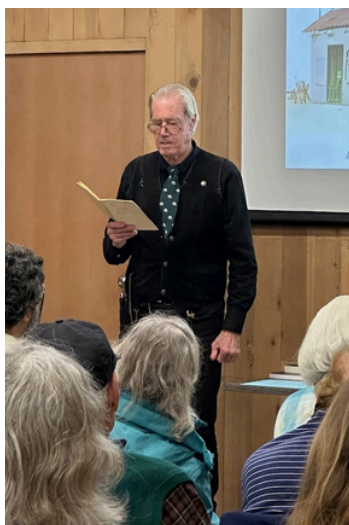
RLS members enjoying the nautical theme

Every guest was given an anchor-themed gift bag with a nautical keychain to honor Austin's fondness of the sea.

Author's Backstory on "Inside Simoneau's Restaurant - A Bohemian Rendezvous" by John Sanderson

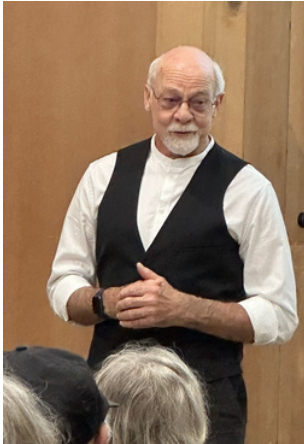
On November 15, had the honor of presenting a new treatment on Jules Simoneau, the jolly proprietor of the Bohemian Rendezvous in Monterey. It was Simoneau who became young Louis Stevenson's "guardian angel" before he gained literary world fame as Robert Louis Stevenson. It was an especially eventful day because the presentation was part of the RLS Club of Monterey's annual celebration of Stevenson's Unbirthday Party.

I reveled as long time club member and professional actor/playwright **Keith Decker** got the unbirthday party started with a reading of Stevenson's Deed of Gift. His Scottish brogue brought RLS's whimsical, mock-legal document to life and brightened the day despite the gray, rainy weather during the November 15 celebration.



From left to right: Keith Decker reading RLS's Deed of Gift; Sanderson's depiction of Simoneau's; Jules Simoneau standing in front of former restaurant, 1895

Continued on p. 6



Continued from p. 5

I'm a relatively new member of the RLS Club. I first began to take an interest in Simoneau a few years ago when **Monica Hudson** took me on a "Walk in the Footsteps of RLS" throughout Monterey. That walkabout sparked my interest in developing a better understanding of 1879 Monterey and convinced me to join the club.

Since then, I have enjoyed a number of meetings with club member **Lindy Perez**, who has graciously shared her wonderful research notebooks as well as her own interest in 19th Century Bohemian culture. Of note, there is a lot of **Lindy** in the backstory of this presentation of "Inside Simoneau's Restaurant." In fact, Lindy even suggested the program title!

Lindy also pointed out a significant omission from my presentation. As she later noted, "Jules Simoneau never owned the building he operated as a restaurant for seven years (1874-1881), but that old Mexican adobe was known by locals and visitors alike as the Simoneau Building until it was torn down in 1920.....and replaced by a gas station."

It is truly ironic that a building he never owned would continue to be identified with him years after his death in 1908. I think a photographic time series of "The Simoneau Building" might yield interesting insight into the cultural change that unfolded between the early days of Simoneau's Bohemian Rendezvous and latter-day Monterey with its new, centrally-located gas station built in the heady months following Armistice and the end of World War I.

I'm glad that **Lindy** raised this point. I always learn something new from her as well as other club members. Among those who have especially contributed to my understanding of 1879 Monterey, the year of Stevenson's stay in "*The Old Pacific Capital*," are: **Terry Trotter, Ruth Anne Krotzer, Mimi Sheridan, Keith Decker, Roger Swearingen** and **Robert Fisher**.

I'm interested in learning more about Jules Simoneau's Bohemian Rendezvous. What did his bar look like? What kind of stove did he cook with? Where did he clean dishes, glassware, beer mugs and linens? And, what might Tavernier's painting of a moonlight camping scene at Point Cypress have looked like in the Bohemian Rendezvous's candlelit salle-à-manger?

I'm pleased that the RLS Club of Monterey has offered to make this flip book of my presentation available to the broader RLS Community (<https://online.fliphtml5.com/Sanders/apue/>). It offers new information about this remarkable place and remarkable period in Monterey's history when a vagabond writer traveled 6,000 miles from Scotland to Monterey where he found "houses so old for a country so new" and a true friend in the Bohemian Jules Simoneau.

So, to borrow **Bob Fisher's** words, "Long Live Simoneau's Bohemian Rendezvous!"

***Lost and Found: the Unfinished Manuscript about Robert Louis Stevenson*
by Laura Bride Powers (before 1947) reviewed by Lindy Perez**

Laura Bride Powers (1867-1947) was one of several reputable female historians who documented Monterey history in the early twentieth century. This sisterhood included Amelie Elkinton, Anne Fisher, Anne Roller Issler, and Mayo Hayes O'Donnell. Each studied and wrote about Stevenson's 1879 stay in Monterey. They were uniquely positioned to interview people who had been in the area in the late 19th century or had known those who associated with RLS.

Laura Bride Powers was the founder and curator of the State Museum of History, located at the Custom House, and was active in preservation. She died before her major work on Stevenson was completed. The manuscript was thought to be lost, but recently discovered in the archives of Monterey History and Art Association. One draft is titled "Stevenson Sails West," another "Stevenson in Old Monterey." There are close to 200 typed and handwritten pages with edits inserted by Powers' daughter, making the read a challenge.

RLS Club members who reviewed the manuscript agree there is little about Stevenson that hasn't been mentioned in other biographies. In the chapter about the Goat Ranch, an interview with one of the Wright daughters provides a good description of the ranch house and Stevenson's writing habits. We learn that Simoneau's frogs cost him \$9 a dozen and that fuchsia trees planted by Simoneau's wife at their Monterey house were transplanted to brighten up Custom House Plaza. Regarding Stevenson himself, most content is taken from his letters and from what others had written about him.

Part regional history, part historical fiction, the narrative is uneven in its unfinished form. Powers is frequently over-dramatic as if trying too hard to be taken seriously as a writer. John Walton, author of *"Storied Land; Community and Memory in Monterey,"* 2001, commented on the style in her previous work, "Old Monterey," 1934: "The histrionic writing is effective for a naive audience." There was a chapter on Stevenson House in this previous work where at least 7 factual errors were found. For those sophisticated members of the RLS Club, who value both facts and style, we would do well to read other biographies and allow this manuscript to remain unpublished.

Maureen Bianchini moved south

First RLS Club President and founding member, **Maureen Bianchini**, moved to Los Angeles shortly after our February 2025 literary Salon which was held at her home. Concerned for her safety her children encouraged her to move to an assisted living facility, which provides memory care, near them. We remember her, and her husband Hugo's steadfast support and interest in all club affairs. Maureen kept up a worldwide correspondence for the club, especially during the 1990's when there was a lot of interest generated around the 100th anniversary of RLS's death in 1994.

We miss her participation and we all recall fondly the many Salon meetings and parties we enjoyed at their home in Monterey. Any correspondence can be relayed to her via the RLS Club to her daughter Marea.

**Book Review- *Storyteller ~ The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* by Leo Damrosch, 2025
by Lindy Perez**

No matter how much you know about Robert Louis Stevenson, you will learn something new from this latest biography, written by Leo Damrosch, a literature professor at Harvard University. The book focuses on Stevenson's writing as much as on his personality and adventures. This is an information-packed narrative, drawn from hundreds of letters and quotes by people who knew him well, describing Stevenson's life and times with fascinating digressions into family history, friendships, contemporary science, and cultural norms within a Victorian context.

As Stevenson travels from place to place, the reader comes to understand the frequency and seriousness of the health crises which plagued Stevenson and his caretaker wife. The author expresses genuine admiration for Louis and Fanny, individually and as a couple, and clarifies apparent contradictions within their unconventional partnership.

The author believes that Stevenson's greatest works are "Thrawn Janet," "The Merry Men," "The Beach of Falesa," "Treasure Island," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "Kidnapped," and "Catriona." The inspiration for and writing of his stories are woven into the narrative. Stevenson is presented as a modern writer who was willing to experiment with a great diversity of forms. At the same time, the author believes Stevenson felt deeply disaffected from the modern world, even as his father embraced modern advances in technology. Thus he was drawn to "lost causes" in Scottish history which fired his imagination, as well as to villains and their violent actions which led to some of his most vivid writing. Stevenson was attracted to life in Samoa because the island was removed from European assumptions of human nature. Nobody saw with such an eye as Stevenson. Most of all, he was a master at creating emotional tension through his writing style, where words are never wasted and combined in ways to grab the reader's attention. Henry James admired his bravery in life and in his art.

Damrosch concludes this excellent biography by explaining his purpose for writing this book in 2025: *"Stevenson's novels have always found readers around the world, and they deserve to find still more. If this biography encourages that, it will have achieved its goal."*

In Memoriam- Carol Young

In May our RLS Club member, **Carol Young**, passed away unexpectedly. Carol worked for a time for California State parks and had a chance to give tours at the Stevenson House in Monterey. Always curious, she became a member of the club. We will miss her fun and curious nature. We extend our sincerest condolences to her family.

Tours available through Monterey State Historic Parks

Join a State Parks Guide for a 45 minute tour. Stevenson House (550 Houston St) at 10:00 and 3:30. Larkin House (464 Calle Principal) at 11:30 and 2:00. Meet at the respective building. Tours are limited to 10 guests. First come, first served. Private Tours can be booked for times outside of regularly scheduled tour times. Two weeks advance notice. Contact Aaron Gilmartin at (831) 649-2907. https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=30491