




The
Silverado
Squatters

Six selected chapters

Robert Louis Stevenson

Illustrations by Earl Thollander

Calligraphy by Mandy Young

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Publisher's Preface

HOW is it that years later, we can happen upon great writers—those whose books occupy a special place in our memory as well as on our bookshelves—and discover works we never knew? Such was my discovery of *The Silverado Squatters* by Robert Louis Stevenson.

During a trip to the Napa Valley, my wife, Lori, and I noticed the book at the Schramsberg Winery. Here I was, a Californian, and I had never known that Stevenson spent part of the summer of 1880 living in a deserted mining town above the Napa Valley. And though I knew *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and, of course, *Treasure Island*, I had never heard of *The Silverado Squatters*. A quick survey of friends and associates yielded similar findings.

Once I started reading *Silverado*, I remembered all over again why Stevenson is one of our great writers. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle said of his fellow Scotsman: “No man handles his adjectives with greater judgment and nicer discrimination. . . . He will make you see a thing more clearly than you would probably have done had your eyes actually rested upon it.”

See more clearly. . . and think more freely. In this book, Stevenson takes us high above the Napa Valley to “the singular privacy and silence” of Silverado, a place so free of distractions and noise that he could make out the notes of four crickets, “each with a corner of his own.” Don’t many of us wish that we, too, could sometimes be squatters in uninterrupted space and time, at liberty to think things through?

As I read *Silverado*, I started describing it to friends as America’s

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other Walden Pond. Only later did I discover Stevenson's essay on Henry David Thoreau, which he wrote the same year he went to Silverado. "He loved to be free," Stevenson said of the man who lived deliberately; "he preferred long rambles to rich dinners...and an easy, calm, unfettered, active life among green trees to dull toiling at the counter of a bank."

Stevenson, too, loved such freedom. Together with his wife, his stepson and Chuchu the dog, he was living the uncivilized yet ideal life at Silverado. (Chuchu, representing the most recently civilized species, was "the most unsuited for a rough life." Lacking his master's yearning for a noble life, he was instead ever in search of sofa cushions.) That Stevenson drank the tonic of wilderness in an abandoned mining camp seems doubly right. Nature will have her way in the end anyway, so we may as well humbly worship her where man has made an accidental pew. *The Silverado Squatters* is a powerful reminder of the joy of spending time in nature, and the benefits such time can have on our reading, writing and thinking.

In bringing you this edition, we debated as to whether we were right to mine *Silverado* for what we feel are the book's most powerful chapters. To borrow from Stevenson's vivid imagery, we look on this edition as being not the conflagration but the candle. We have tried to capture the essence of a work that may spark in you—as it did in us at Levenger—a renewed determination to do what we often only dream of.

I hope you will find this book a delight to look at and to hold as well as to read. Perhaps it will come to occupy a special place on your bookshelf.

—Steven Leveen

Introduction to the Levensger Press Edition

IT WAS a love story from almost the beginning.

Robert Louis Stevenson's stay in an abandoned California mining town, a two-month idyll during the summer of 1880 that he would soon celebrate in the nonfiction work, *The Silverado Squatters*, had its beginnings four years earlier in an artist's colony in Grez, France. There the twenty-five-year-old Stevenson, having rejected the family engineering business and his father's wish that he practice law, met an American art student from Indianapolis, Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne. She was older than he by a decade, married, and recovering from the death of her third child, Hervey, who at the age of four had succumbed to scrofulous tuberculosis. At first, Fanny was taken with Stevenson's cousin, Robert Alan Mowbray, who had accompanied him to Grez. But it was Fanny and Louis who eventually fell in love.

On August 7, 1879, Stevenson boarded the steamer *Devonia* near Glasgow, left his native Scotland and embarked on a grueling voyage across the Atlantic to New York City, an ordeal he later recounted in *The Amateur Emigrant*. From there he made an eleven-day train journey across America that he relived in "Across the Plains." He arrived, at last, with daybreak in San Francisco. All this was to reach Fanny, who was then living in Monterey and soon to divorce her husband, Sam Osbourne, a former miner in both Nevada and California.

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Fanny Osbourne and Robert Louis Stevenson were married in San Francisco on May 19, 1880. A few weeks later, together with Samuel Lloyd Osbourne, Fanny's twelve-year-old son, and Chuchu, a mix of spaniel and setter, they embarked on a highly unconventional extended honeymoon. The group would spend the following weeks living in an abandoned miner's bunkhouse tucked into a side of Mount Saint Helena, high above the Napa Valley in the deserted California mining town of Silverado.

For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health—both Stevenson's penury and his fragile health took them to Silverado. (Sickly since a child, Stevenson was plagued by lung disease.) After their wedding, the couple had stayed briefly at the Hot Springs Hotel in Calistoga, at the beginning of the Napa Valley. A hopeful but never fully realized amalgam of "California" and "Saratoga," Calistoga could nevertheless command a hotel rate beyond the Stevensons' reach: ten dollars per week per person. Abandoned miner's quarters came with no price save some inconvenience, and they were far removed (most of the time, at least) from the sea fogs of San Francisco that caused such havoc with Stevenson's health.

The Stevensons first considered squatting at Pine Flat, but there was no way to get the fresh milk that Stevenson required. Morris Friedberg, a well-known Calistoga merchant, suggested Silverado. (Friedberg became known to readers of *The Silverado Squatters* as Kelmar.) Perhaps the choice was even more fortunate in that several of the buildings in Pine Flat burned to the ground that July.

Introduction to the Levensen Press Edition

Once a bustling town of nearly 1,500, Silverado had died when the Calistoga Gold and Silver Mine Company bled its vein of silver dry in the mid-1870s. But it was a manageable walk down the mountain from Silverado to the Toll House hotel, where the stagecoach delivered the mail, and there were neighbors who could deliver fresh milk.

And so on June 9, the King and Queen of Silverado, as Stevenson referred to himself and Fanny, set out from Calistoga with the Crown Prince (Samuel Lloyd), the Grand Duke (Chuchu) and their furnishings (books, mainly) for the three-story bunkhouse at Silverado.

This edition of *The Silverado Squatters* has been distilled from the original book published in London by Chatto and Windus. It contains six chapters in their original sequence: “The Silverado Squatters,” the opening chapter, “Napa Wine,” “The Act of Squatting,” “The Sea Fogs,” “Episodes in the Story of a Mine” and “Toils and Pleasures,” the book’s concluding chapter.

These chapters present many of the principal characters of that Silverado summer. Rufe and Mary Jane Hanson are the neighbors who, with their sons and their boarder, Jim Breedlove, bring milk as well as news. (Stevenson refers to Mrs. Hanson’s brother as Caliban.) The habitués of the Toll House hotel are here: Mr. Hoddy, barkeeper and former editor of the *Calistoga Free Press* newspaper (he and Stevenson sometimes borrowed each other’s books); Mr. Corwin, the landlord; and Mr. Jennings, a mining engineer. The so-called ghosts of Silverado were in fact still living: Sam Chapman, the former landlord of the Stevensons’

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bunkhouse; and John Stanley, who had been a boarder during the glory days of silver.

Mr. Ronalds (the correct spelling was Reynolds), one of a partnership that had staked claim to the mine in the 1870s, puts in an unnerving appearance. And on the way to Silverado, in another kind of California mine that would prove far more sustaining than silver or gold, Stevenson meets the Napa Valley vintners Colin T. McEachran and Jacob Schram. In the book, Stevenson refers to the former, a fellow Scotsman and owner of the Alta Vineyard, as M'Eckron. The latter's vineyards, Schramsberg, are still in production.

But the stunning silence and beauty of the Silverado summer are at the height of this story; Stevenson makes that clear. And along with the personal love story, another kind of passion is being played out: the writing of Robert Louis Stevenson. The Scribbler, the Napa locals called him—always writing, writing in his notebook. By the time he left Mount Saint Helena at the end of July, Stevenson had completed *The Amateur Emigrant* and begun *The Silverado Squatters*.

His most popular novel, *Treasure Island*, lay ahead. But some Stevenson scholars maintain that in both setting and incident, *Treasure Island* was conceived during Stevenson's year in California and in particular, during that Silverado summer. *Treasure Island* was published in 1883, the same year as *The Silverado Squatters*.

Afterword: From Silverado to Samoa

IN LATE July of 1880 the King and Queen of Silverado and their retinue descended Mount Saint Helena and departed from San Francisco for Stevenson's native Edinburgh. Stevenson spent the next years searching for a climate that would assure him better health. After spending seven years in various parts of Britain and on the Continent, he returned to America in September of 1887 with Fanny, Lloyd, his mother and a maid. They spent several months at Saranac Lake, New York, but then journeyed once again to San Francisco to begin another voyage. This one took them thousands of miles west, to the South Seas.

On June 28, 1888, they sailed from San Francisco Bay on a ninety-four-foot, two-masted schooner, the *Casco*, bound for the Marquesas Islands, Tahiti and then Honolulu. One year later (without his mother, who had returned to Scotland), they embarked on the trading schooner *Equator* for Samoa. By September 1890 Stevenson was ensconced in Vailima, his sprawling estate on the Western Samoa island of Upolu. The man the Napa locals called the Scribbler was known among the Samoans as *Tusitala*, teller of tales.

Stevenson died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage on December 3, 1894. He was 44. He was buried, as was his wish, on

AFTERWORD

top of the mountain at Vailima. There was no road up its steep face; the native men, who had developed an affection for this Tusitala, had to carve one out. And so, fourteen years after he had made one journey to reach Silverado's Mount Saint Helena, Robert Louis Stevenson made his final journey up another mountain.

His tombstone contains two bronze panels. One bears the inscription "The Tomb of Tusitala," the other the first and third stanzas of his poem, "Requiem."

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

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