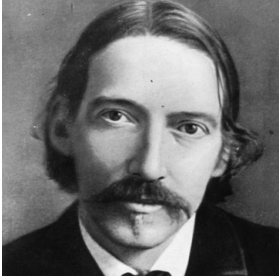


# The Great Tide Pool

**TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA**  
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)



## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S PACIFIC GROVE

When one considers Pacific Grove's literary pedigree, no name looms larger than John Steinbeck, who made his home here and, it can be argued, made PG his muse. But what many don't realize is this: Robert Louis Stevenson wrote about the place first.



In 1879, more than a half-century before Steinbeck moved into his family's cottage on 11th Street, Stevenson arrived on the Monterey Peninsula after enduring a long boat journey from his native Scotland and a train from New York City. He was sickly, struggling, largely unknown, and had yet to produce his most famous works, including *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. But he was dedicated. It was said that he carried notebooks and sharpened pencils with him as he meandered through the Peninsula.



One day, Stevenson's wanderings included a walk from Monterey to Pacific Grove, which he called the "Pacific Camp Grounds, the Christian Seaside Resort" where "in the warm season, crowds come to enjoy a life of teetotalism, religion, and flirtation, which I am willing to think blameless and agreeable." But Stevenson saw no crowds. This was the offseason of the Methodist retreat. Still, his prose - in an evocative essay called *The Old Pacific Capital* - is arguably the most eloquent account of Pacific Grove as a fledgling place.

He wrote: "Without leaving the woods, I found myself among trim houses. I walked through street after street, parallel and at right angles, paved with sward and dotted with trees, but still undeniable streets, and each with its name posted at the corner, as in a real town. Facing down the main thoroughfare - 'Central Avenue,' as it was ticketed - I saw an open-air temple, with benches and sounding-board, as though for an orchestra. The houses were all tightly shuttered; there was no smoke, no sound but of the waves, no moving thing. I have never been in any place that seemed so dream-like."



Stevenson's description included observations about both the location and a particular vocation: "The neighbourhood at least is well selected. The Pacific booms in front. Westward is Point Pinos, with the lighthouse in a wilderness of sand, where you will find the lightkeeper playing the piano, making models and bows and arrows, studying dawn and sunrise in amateur oil-painting, and with a dozen other elegant pursuits and interests to surprise his brave, old-country rivals."



Little-known fact: Lighthouse construction was actually the Stevenson family profession, so it comes as no surprise that the author was perhaps most captivated by the shores and the sea. "On no other coast that I know," he wrote, "shall you enjoy, in calm, sunny weather, such a spectacle of Ocean's greatness, such beauty of changing colour, such degrees of thunder and sound. The very air is more than usually salt by this Homeric deep."



After his brief foray on the Monterey Peninsula (and a honeymoon in Northern California), Stevenson returned home and began serializing a children's story that came to be known as... *Treasure Island*. I'm convinced that this legendary tale of buccaneers and buried gold is based on Stevenson's exploration of Point Lobos, just north of the Peninsula. But I also suspect that the author's visit to Pacific Grove's rocky shores played a role in his vivid description.

So now I can't hear Long John Silver's exhortation - "Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum" - without thinking of Pacific Grove's "teetotalers." Go figure.

*The Great  
Tidepool*