

“Bohemian Jack” by Doc Stull , March 1, 2014

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Whether it was savoring shrimp and scallops and pasta and copious amounts of red wine next to the mural-bedecked high-ceilinged walls of *Coppa's* restaurant or cavorting in San Francisco's infamous “Monkey Block” at the base of Montgomery Ave. (now Columbus) – or kite-flying and parties and picnics in the Piedmont Hills - or pounding abalone to the sounds of Hawaiian ukulele tunes at the artists' colony at Carmel-by-the-Sea, Jack London was part of a group of progressive, political, and precocious artists, writers, and free spirits referred to as “The Crowd.”

Before the hippies, before the Beats, and before the hipsters, San Francisco had its turn-of-the-20th century Bohemians – Jack's good friend poet/voluptuary George Sterling (“The Greek”) was one; so was Prussian-born, classically trained scholar-turned photographer Arnold Genthe, Mexican-born Paris-educated painter and portraitist Xavier Martinez, athlete /writers Jimmy Hopper and Jim Whitaker, early feminist/Native American advocate and Southwest nature writer Mary Austin, and music and drama critic Blanche Partington. Jack's eventual second wife and future “Mate-Woman,” Charmian Kittredge, also ran with the Crowd. Jack was drawn to the Bohemian lifestyle of intellectual and political freedom, artistic and often treacherous romantic adventurism. The Crowd was enamored of Jack's charisma, wit, and intense sense of adventure, while also fueling Jack's hunger for literary and social acceptance.

Many colorful members of The Crowd were fictionalized in Jack's Carmel and Big Sur descriptions in his novel *Valley of the Moon*. George Sterling, fictionalized as

Mark Hall, was also the inspiration for the poet Brissenden portrayed tragically and presciently in Jack's semi-autobiographical novel, *Martin Eden*.

California's first Poet-Laureate and Oakland Public Librarian, Ina Coolbrith, herself a "Pre-Crowd" San Francisco Bohemian, was instrumental in young ten year-old Jack's early Bohemian appetite by recommending books that told of romance, risk, adventure and self-discovery.

