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We Three Kings of 415

1936–1938

WITH BOTH OF MARION'S pictures in 1936 having wrapped—*Hearts Divided*, with Dick Powell, early in the year; *Cain and Mabel*, with Clark Gable, in the late spring—she and Hearst were poised to leave for Europe on an extended trip, their first since 1934. It would also be their last.

Between the work on those films, the date May 2, 1936, found Hearst and Marion hosting the first of three consecutive parties at the Beach House in his honor (May 2 was a Saturday: the current leap year had deposited his April 29 birthday on a useless Wednesday). We Three Kings of 415, those annual events of 1936 through 1938 can be called. All three were costume spectacles. At San Simeon, George Looz recounted the 1936 installment, for which a dress rehearsal was staged on Saturday, April 11; he told an engineering colleague named Millard Hendricks:

Mr. Hearst and about 40 guests drove over last Saturday [on the Burnett Road, partly built by Hendricks north of the Castle hilltop] for a fine Spanish picnic with 20 Spanish entertainers at Milpitas.

Their destination had been the Milpitas Hacienda, another recent Hearst-Morgan creation, this one across the Santa Lucia Range from San Simeon in rural Monterey County. The Milpitas Hacienda stands on former Hearst acreage near the hamlet of Jolon and Mission San Antonio; it's been part of Fort Hunter Liggett since the 1940s.

A week before Hearst's party of May 2, Loorz contacted the Palisades Glass Co. in Santa Monica; his letter was dated April 23, 1936:

As per our phone conversation, I will expect to see you Monday [April 27] to take templates of the Peach shaded mirrors for the Second Floor Bedroom, Billiard Room Wing Bathroom [on the north side of Casa Grande].

It seems a shame to have to make a special trip up here to take measurements when I could really have sent you the templates. However, to allow clearances to[o] for the shutter openings etc. I thot it wise for you to come up for this first one. Then I can take the templates for the other two when they are ready.

I was surprised at not finding your name or company name in the L.A. directory of 1934 which is the latest we have. This was greater L.A. but perhaps Santa Monica was not in it at all. So I took a chance and called the old number with success.

Ah, but those were the days when not only phone numbers were often easy to come by (provided one used the right directory) but sometimes also the addresses and occupations of the people listed: gardener, banker, teacher, actor—that sort of innocent thing. Even Hearst had a listing, care of the Examiner Building on South Broadway. His identity? Publisher.

The same Spanish costumes that he and others wore on April 11 were seen again on May 2 at the Beach House. Except that now those forty guests had become several times as many, enough to send matters into the "Hearstratosphere," as *Daily Variety* quipped in its droll but trademark show-biz slang, in reference to April 29:

As salute to Hearst on his birthday (29), member of entourage had skywriter longhand the firmament over Santa Monica beach with, "Happy Birthday, Mr. Hearst."

Type faces looked wrong font.

The rival *Hollywood Reporter* specialized in its own kind of industry slang, describing Marion as “soo booful” and, more straightforwardly, recounting that “William R. Hearst’s birthday cake was a replica of his famous Wyntoon ranch and measured eight by six feet!” The *Reporter* also noted that one of the two hundred guests was “Little Mary Grace,” who was on her “first time out after that frightful auto-smash.” The allusion was to an episode a few months earlier, when Miss Grace and a fellow teenager and actress, Margaret Ehrlich, crashed into the California Incline at the south end of Palisades Beach Road after a gathering at the Beach House; the Ehrlich girl died en route to Santa Monica Hospital.

Dark incidents aside, the Spanish fiesta of 1936 was one of six parties—two at San Simeon, four in Santa Monica—depicted in 1972 in an *Esquire* magazine feature by Ouida Rathbone, the wife of Basil Rathbone (who in 1935 had appeared in *Captain Blood*, a non-Davies Cosmopolitan Production through Warner Bros.). “Happy Birthday W. R.,” the Ouida Rathbone spread was entitled. “When William Randolph Hearst told Hollywood to come to his birthday parties, Hollywood damn well came.” So went the subheading. Hearst and Marion appeared together in the *Esquire* photos, he as a Spanish grandee, she as his “Little Lady” in a tightly corseted dress, her blond curls spilling out of a wide-brimmed hat. At thirty-nine, she looked very much as Virginia Madsen would at that age, an actress who’s always admired Marion after portraying her in the 1985 TV movie *The Hearst and Davies Affair*, opposite Robert Mitchum as Hearst. Another photo from the Spanish fiesta party, not included in the *Esquire* feature but given a full page in *The Times We Had*, showed Hearst and Arthur Brisbane, who died at the end of 1936, just eight months later.

Indeed, for Alice Head, 1936 wasn’t the beginning of a new era, despite Hearst’s eternal boyishness and his penciled-on mustache for

the fiesta party. “On looking back,” she wrote, “the year 1936 seems to have represented in some ways the end of an era, and I am sure that Mr. Hearst [also] had this feeling”:

For once more we made a Grand Tour of Europe and this time he continually urged us to make the best of our opportunities as he said it might be the last chance we should have of seeing the Art Treasures of Europe. The Spanish [Civil] War had just started and at times it seemed possible that hostilities would not be confined to that country. . . .

For family reasons I had not been able to visit America in 1936, so I had been overjoyed to hear that Mr. Hearst was coming over to Europe in July [he actually sailed in early August]. He traveled on the Italian line [the *Rex*] and landed with a small party of friends at Naples, where Arthur Brisbane met them. He cabled me to join him at Naples, but I could not leave London in time, so having arranged with Colonel Willicombe to tell me the itinerary, I caught up with the party at Rome.

There they connected with Count Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law, at the Villa Madama; they gazed out over the Eternal City, as Miss Head further recounted:

After cocktails in the garden, we were seated at dinner, and handsome Count Ciano opened the conversation at our end of the table by telling Marion that he had often wished to see Hollywood, having heard much about it. Marion calmly replied by asking him what he had been doing to the Abyssinians [the Ethiopians, invaded by Italy in 1935]. Arthur Brisbane was petrified, and for a moment we all wondered how the Count was going to take it, but Marion’s gaiety and humour were unconquerable and the Count soon became familiar with the joyous American characteristic of entire naturalness. It was an unforgettable evening and after we had soothed Arthur Brisbane’s fears of international complications the atmosphere could not have been more gay and friendly.

The Hearst party moved on to Florence and then to Venice:

Towards the end of our stay at Venice, Arthur Brisbane became ill. He was a wealthy man, but I do not think he liked spending money on

himself. On this trip he had no secretary, no one to help him with his work [he was still filing his regular column, “Today”]. . . . A doctor was summoned, and after some amount of treatment Mr. Brisbane felt well enough to rejoin his family at Paris. But his state of health was serious and he died the following December [1936]. He was one of the outstanding figures in the Hearst organization and liked to think of himself as the highest paid journalist in the world.

From Venice they crossed the Alps into Switzerland, as Miss Head further noted, putting emphasis on Hearst’s style as a host, traveler, and self-appointed guide for the group:

Mr. Hearst demands absolute flexibility of arrangements, constant last-minute changes of plan and the attitude that nothing is impossible, and this was one of the states of mind that I found it hardest to achieve. . . . It took me a long while to be ready for anything at any minute, which is a sine qua non when traveling with the Chief.

It was that temperament, of course, that regal personality that stood behind everything he’d done at San Simeon and, more recently, at Wynton—and at the Beach House too.

Miss Head continued with her narrative of events late in the summer of 1936:

The Regina Palast Hotel, Munich, was our next port of call, and here I left the party and returned to London to see that St. Donat’s [in Wales] was ready for the Chief’s visit. . . . This year Mr. Hearst and party stopped on at St. Donat’s until October and a number of English guests came for week-ends or longer.

The Hearst party finally left England at the end of October on a new Cunard liner, the *Queen Mary*. It was a later departure than normal for Hearst and Marion. But remember, they had to avoid California through December 31 for the non-resident tax break to apply; thus they repaired to their suite on the 33rd floor of the Ritz Tower in Manhattan, a building once owned by Arthur Brisbane and

subsequently absorbed by Hearst as part of his New York portfolio (shades of his leasehold position in Santa Monica, the prime difference being that Marion's nominal ownership of the Beach House remained intact for now).

WHILE ABROAD IN 1936, Hearst got word from Julia Morgan, dated August 5. He'd written to her as follows—this from New York on July 30, shortly before heading to Europe:

If we could possibly get linoleum on the upper decks of the beach house, I would like to have it much better than canvas.

Canvas is not very nice and it tracks [shows wear and footprints]. Linoleum looks better and I imagine it could be cemented in such a way as to make it impervious.

Humdrum stuff, this thing of linoleum versus canvas at the Beach House, frankly not the grandeur that readily comes to mind when "Marion's house" or the more imposing "Marion Davies Estate" crop up.

Morgan's reply of August 5 would have reached Hearst in Italy. It told of progress at San Simeon and elsewhere; this was the part that concerns us:

At Santa Monica, on receiving your letter we started investigations as to the life of linoleum laid on a wood underfloor—and so far the reports are not favorable—on account of the various contractions and expansions involved.

Working drawings are ready for the Great Library, and [the] Help's House over the store room.

Not surprisingly, Morgan conveyed these details without saying a thing about Marion, as though the Beach House were *his*, not *hers*, or perhaps simply *theirs*, as Jack Warner would eventually say (and much earlier as Ilka Chase would say with "Hearst-Davies mansion")—with

both Warner and Chase speaking as though Hearst and Marion were a married couple, despite their great age difference, as though they were the Mr. & Mrs. Hearst they could never be. In that imaginary case, given his instinct for design and his mechanical aptitude, Hearst could well be expected to speak for both of them, for himself and his youthful bride.

Morgan also wrote to Hearst on November 11, 1936. Her letter went direct to him at the Ritz Tower in Manhattan; it arrived there well after the election of November 3, the one that gave Franklin D. Roosevelt a second term. She briefed Hearst on Wynton, on Jolon-Milpitas, on San Simeon, and again on the Beach House in Santa Monica. The most telling detail about the Beach House was this: “The Service Annex is completed—(no furniture).” Did she in fact mean the 321 building at the north end of the property, a structure possibly synonymous with the Help’s House she’d mentioned on August 5? It remains unclear exactly what part of the Ocean Front compound she meant. Just its newer annex, as she termed it above? Or the entire 321 structure, whose older parts dated from 1929 and 1930 and which, in 1931, had been briefly used not only by Sam Goldwyn but also by Flo Ziegfeld, Billie Burke, and their young daughter, Patricia?

Morgan’s letter of November 11, 1936, also said of the Beach House:

The last painters’ work is being done in the two upper “Porch” rooms. They are quite different, one from the other, but both are good. The library’s woodwork and ceiling are completed, but there is quite a bit of work yet—floors to lay, painters, etc. It is as fine as the [drafting] studies promised.

Hearst would have known whether Morgan meant the painters or the rooms in her ambiguous second sentence (she never pretended to be as good a writer as she was an architect). Hearst scrawled in reply, using his heavy-penciled cursive, “This will be ready I hope by the

middle of January.” His further scrawlings (transcribed by Willicombe and sent forth on November 13) went like so:

I could have allowed two weeks more [before shutting down the various jobs for the winter] if it had been suggested. The reason was taxes which are becoming confiscatory and will be worse this coming year.

Then we had *four* places to work on [Wyntoon, Jolon, San Simeon, Santa Monica] and in addition a bill at St. Donat’s.

This last paragraph of Hearst’s is problematic, as much so as Morgan’s imprecise one about the painters and the rooms. His use of “Then” may be time-specific, as in 1936 and events gone by. In contrast, he could have been looking toward 1937, as in “Then [when taxes are even worse] we would have had *four* places to work on” . . . if we see fit to alter his tense. It’s rare for Hearst to be this unclear; all Hearstiana specialists have long been spoiled by his incisiveness. The matter calls for that proverbial safety-net *at any rate*. Therefore, at any rate, be it 1936 or 1937 in Hearst’s intended meaning, which we can assume Morgan understood, he further told her in his reply:

However we can completely finish the beach house now and proceed with work at San Simeon after the first of the year.

There will be no occasion to resume work at McCloud [Wyntoon] until May.

I shall not be in California until about the middle of January. I am delighted that everything has gone so well.

The election wasn’t much help, was it?

MUCH EARLIER IN 1936, Hayes Perkins had begun his fourth season at Wyntoon under Fred Stolte, George Loorz’s contractor-partner in the F. C. Stolte Co. On Sunday, June 21, Perkins resumed his diary after a long layoff:

Almost two months since last entry. The work has been very hard, and I strained some muscles in my side, but have kept on. Life is like that. We must learn to take the bitter with the sweet.

Hearst is with us after all. That means starting at ten o'clock in the morning and finishing at 6:30 at night, so we have no evening and our morning is spoiled. We wish he would leave, he is little use to us here. His hair is snow white, but it is the time of life for that. His perception is keen, his step elastic, he sees everything. Marion breaks [moves] fast. Gay life at her age does her little good. Her eyes are hard now, but Hearst adores her as he has from the beginning. . . .

This has been an unusual spring. Tropical deluges of rain until this week, and now it is very warm, presaging more rain. Hearst leaves for Europe tomorrow [Monday the 22nd] and all of us are glad. We hope he don't return until after we are done here for the season. He has "discovered" [Alfred M.] Landon, the man they picked last year when Hoover was here. What hypocrites men are! . . .

Hearst wouldn't be leaving the U.S. quite as soon as Perkins thought, not until August 8 from New York. In the meantime, he was soon to leave California for an interim stop at his Grand Canyon property in Arizona.

The long entry by Perkins dated June 21, 1936, continued with these comments:

Max Schmeling, a German [boxer], beat the hitherto unbeatable Joe Louis [at Yankee Stadium on June 19], which has caused as much excitement as a great battle would in war. As it is a contest between two races it does rouse every primitive instinct in man.

Landon has received the Republican nomination for president [on June 12]. He might beat Roosevelt, but I doubt it. Frankly, I hope he does.

Perkins stuck to politics for part of his next entry, dated July 15:

[I am] Registered Republican, and am going to vote for Landon in November if we are here [on the job still]. Four more years of Roosevelt will wreck this or any other country. As everybody is trying to get

something for nothing and Roosevelt freely opens the doors of the treasury, this will soon sap the very foundations of the nation. . . .

Italy has not had such an easy win over Abyssinia. If the natives [the Ethiopians] would fight guerilla warfare they could block the Italians indefinitely. To hurl themselves in masses on the guns of the invaders is suicide, but they don't know it. One wonders when the next big war will break out? The stage is all set for the big show. The French and British are more interested in evading their debt [from the World War] than in heading off the rising Germans. It will be worse than the last conflict, and God alone knows how it will end.

Hearst exercised his prerogative as big boss and ripped everything to pieces [before he left on June 22]. The basement we worked so hard to excavate and pour last winter is now to be ripped out. The house [Bridge House], half erected, torn down and moved bodily across the river [from the McCloud's north bank to its south bank]. A great bridge is being thrown across the McCloud there, and this will run through the [aforementioned] house. As long as Hearst can afford this waste of money we can continue tearing down anything he wishes dismantled. But it seems foolish to do so after so great [an] effort.

Two entries later, under September 6, 1936, Perkins had these matters to recount:

Winter has begun earlier this year. Frost has not fallen yet, but the mornings have been cold since the middle of August. Several of us have been thirty miles east of McCloud [the town], where we got several truck loads of weathered timbers to put in the new houses [at Wyntoon]. . . .

The crew has been cut down to the bone. I never know whether it will be my turn or not, but I keep on working until the time comes. . . .

Hearst has gone to Europe again. Is in Rome just now, where he should find congenial company. He is a Facist [Fascist] anyway. Marion tags along as is usual, and all the world knows it. He is a rather poor advertiser of this country.

Marion will try to crash in on the Pope, for she is one of the Faithful of the Holy Church. Of course she can easily gain absolution if she can

handle the Hearst fortune and press for the [Roman Catholic] Cause, and doubtless she does.

Perkins was correct in his next entry, dated September 27, in speaking of the big shutdown ordered by Hearst from thousands of miles away, an order affecting San Simeon and all his other projects late in 1936. Perkins was wrong, though, in saying that George Loorz had been “let go,” for that detail was soon rescinded:

We leave October 1st. Hearst, for some reason best known to himself, is laying off every non-essential member of his staff at both San Simeon and at Wyntoon. Even Loorz has been let go, and only skeleton crews are being kept on. To me this layoff is a godsend. My shoulder is so crippled with rheumatism I can scarce keep going, but [Harry] Thompson has kept me on just the same. I do all I can, and that is more than most do. I want to leave here before the winter snow covers the country, and hope never to see McCloud again.

Evidently Perkins never did. In turn, he barely attended to his diary any longer, whether authentically or furtively, contrivedly or pseudo-historically. His next to last entry was dated October 5:

Harry Thompson asked me to come with him to Yosemite and work this winter [for the F. C. Stolte Co. on a Yosemite Park & Curry Co. job], then return to McCloud in the spring.

Five days later Perkins was in San Francisco. He made his final entry in a diary that he apparently wouldn't touch again for more than twenty years, not until the late 1950s and the revisions and often screwball rewriting he did then. He composed two last paragraphs, ostensibly on October 10, 1936; the latter of them says:

Politics are booming. It is always that way every four years when a president is elected. No lie is too bad to tell about the opposite side, and Roosevelt is a past master at this craft. The biggest spellbinder, rabble rouser we have ever known.

On that score at least, Hayes Perkins and William Randolph Hearst were in perfect accord.

ALICE HEAD, last seen making preparations for the Hearst party's descent on St. Donat's Castle, fall of 1936, included some typically moving, richly descriptive lines about that ancient place, much as she'd previously done for San Simeon and for the Beach House; however, the contrast between what she chose to say about the estate in Wales and the absence of any such words about Santa Monica is striking:

Some of the happiest times of my life have been spent at St. Donat's. For the whole of the twelve years that it has been in our possession [owned by Hearst's National Magazine Company since 1925], Mr. Hearst granted me the much-valued privilege of allowing me to entertain friends there from time to time. . . .

Nor must I forget the occasion when Mr. Hearst lent the castle to Mr. and Dame Margaret Lloyd George for the entertainment of the bards from the Eisteddfodd. . . . Harpists and jesters entertained us with song and dance, and outside the castle walls a choir sang the old Welsh songs. Periodically came the changing of the guard, and, as the dinner proceeded, the bards recited their verses to the Lord of the Manor. Mr. Lloyd George [a Welshman] was in his native element.

He was thrilled and delighted with this one-night's throw-back to the Middle Ages. And, indeed, it was a memorable evening. The setting was so perfect, the transformation to the fourteenth century so realistic and complete.

It seems odd that Alice Head, a woman possessed of ample powers of observation and description, never said a thing about the Beach House as a paradigm of the eighteenth century. Important? Not important? Merely the luck or even the ill-luck of the literary draw? She probably had good reason, though little of it was based on the need to protect Hearst and Marion's privacy. Urbane and wise in her low-key way, she probably saw the Beach House for what it was: a

delightful party place, in many ways a Hollywood fluff piece sprung from the tradition-bound yet still wizardly minds of Hearst and Julia Morgan, much less the enduring *home* that San Simeon was palatially meant to be (she never saw rustic Wyntoon).

Miss Head's words about St. Donat's continued:

At the moment of writing [1938 or 1939], I know not what the future of St. Donat's Castle will be. I can only be thankful that I have been allowed to enjoy its beauties and the gracious existence one leads there, for so many years. The experiences I have had in connection with St. Donat's have enriched my life in many directions. The reconstruction work, the furnishing, the management of the estate and servants, various details of housekeeping on a large scale—all have been contributed to an experience I would not willingly have foregone.

HEARST CHANGED HIS PLANS about leaving New York by the middle of January 1937. When Morgan wrote to him on the 15th, she did so knowing that he'd be at the Ritz Tower for a while yet. The alterations job she'd begun in Santa Monica early in 1936 was entering its second year:

At the Beach House, a few chairs for the new library are badly needed. The red and the green wing chairs, satin damask covered, look well. The very low modern chairs of [the] old library, tried for effect, do not look well.

Morgan's one check-up on the Beach House job in January fell on the 20th, her birthday; from there she doubled back up the coast to San Simeon. She returned to Santa Monica once in late February 1937 and once also in late March of that year. By then the alterations job had pretty much run its course.

Hearst and Marion reappeared at San Simeon in February. They hadn't been there since the spring of 1936, and they wouldn't be staying long: she had a film to start at Warner Bros. in Burbank, *Ever*

Since Eve, which would prove to be her last. Seven other non-Davies films would bear the Cosmopolitan “label” in 1937 (today *brand* would be the trendier term), among them *Green Light*, with Errol Flynn and Anita Louise.

Hearst’s roots were in show business, traceable back to his college days at Harvard, with its Hasty Pudding Club, and earlier still, to his spoiled-rich boyhood in ribald San Francisco. He’d swooned over Lillian Russell when her troupe came to the city in 1881, right before he left for Harvard; he was eighteen then to her nineteen. His affair with a young beauty named Tessie Powers in Cambridge fits the pattern; so does his having bought a letter in 1891 by Lola Montez through an auction house in Boston. Such stuff was in his blood. And now there was Marion, the great love of his life forever more. In 1937, a month shy of turning seventy-four, he told his warehouse manager in New York that he wanted “to collect ALL the old photos” he could, “back to 1875,” when Hearst was twelve. “I would like almost entirely stage people, and for the most part women as they are more decorative”:

These photos need not always be of stars. They can be of pretty girls in minor parts, or even in the chorus.

Marion had been a young chorine. That’s where Hearst had first spotted her in New York early in 1914 in *The Queen of the Movies*, a man-catching albeit minor role that her mother had groomed her for, just as she’d groomed Marion’s three sisters, all of them older than her. Hearst stated his case unmistakably by naming names for his warehouseman to have in mind:

I would like to go back to Alice Duning [Dunning] Lingard, Maude Branscome [Maud Branscombe], Maude Granger, Adelaide Neilson, &c, &c.

The going back was done. The photos came west. They got entered in Julia Morgan’s massive Pacific Coast Register before they

slipped into the dim reaches of the San Simeon warehouses, scarcely to be seen again. But it was the thought that counted in 1937. As Hayes Perkins would have said of Hearst, the man was living in the past, and not just in the past of the nineteenth century. Hearst was far more anachronistic than merely a Victorian revivalist. No, he was “mediaeval, baronial—doubly baronial,” as Aldous Huxley would write in 1939 of San Simeon in the novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. For the ultra-urbane, world-weary Huxley (a mere forty-five when the book appeared), San Simeon was the fullest embodiment of Hearstism.

Hearst had Joe Willicombe send Morgan a brief message on April 5, 1937. It went forth from Los Angeles, Hearst and Marion being in town still for the sake of *Ever Since Eve*, all the while living at the Beach House (never mind Jack Warner’s statement about Marion’s camping out at the Cosmopolitan Bungalow in Burbank, more than twenty miles inland from Santa Monica):

Chief asks if we have in storage anywhere on Coast [a] Colonial type four-poster double bed for use at [the] Beach House. Kindly telegraph me at *Examiner*.

Morgan wired her reply to Willicombe the next day, April 6:

Two delicate mahogany four posters are in Shasta warehouse [near Wyntoon]. Look under Furniture: Beds in Wyntoon picture catalogue.

Here she was referring to a different archival breed from the P C Register, specifically, the Pictorial Inventories, which survive primarily in the private Morgan-Forney Collection.

Morgan put her thoughts into letter form the next day, April 7, 1937, writing to Hearst care of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, at that time a mightier paper than the *Los Angeles Times* of the Chandler dynasty:

Mr. [Warren] McClure is going to be in Los Angeles this week end on some personal matter, and will bring you the Wyntoon base inventory

from which the Photostats are made, as showing the furniture at larger scale and with the pieces not in use marked [those not already placed in rooms somewhere].

I realize also that furniture in “The Bend” [at Wyntoon] could be drawn on [for the Beach House] as the least fine are wonderful pieces.

If you would like me to follow up the changes in the Beach House furniture, I will do so gladly—as it is something not easy to delegate on account of the variety of resources.

In other words, Morgan alone could do right by the task. Accept no substitutes; trust no one unworthy. She and Hearst understood each other implicitly that way. They’d stubbornly taken few chances in important matters like this for nearly twenty years at San Simeon, not to mention for the sake of Wyntoon and Santa Monica. Her letter contained this final paragraph:

There is the possibility of gathering some lovely rooms [in the Beach House] by bringing together related pieces, a very light group in pear wood and painted wood or inlay—as contrasted with a group very dark and rich in tone, etc.

Hearst scrawled his reply at the bottom. Willicombe amplified it somewhat in transcribing his master’s thick, rugged penciling on April 15:

I have your letter of April 7th regarding Wyntoon and the rooms at the Beach House.

I certainly would greatly like you to follow up and make lovely rooms.

I did [not] think I would bother you [about this matter], but I am very pleased that you will do this.

An undated note to Morgan, likewise penciled by Hearst, dates from sometime in the first part of 1937 and can be cited here:

I think the Gold Room at the beach house looks very well just as it is now.

Perhaps it needs another sofa and a couple more stuffed chairs in the dark blue. I am trying to get them.

The room itself is divided into *two* rooms by the columns. I don't think one table in the center would overcome this.

I think it better to accept the division and furnish each room more or less as a separate unit.

I will try to find some suitable furniture of a minor kind such as you describe. Perhaps you know of some.

We should have everything done that you mention in the upstairs room.

I don't know what to do with the big green [furniture] suite in the center first floor bed room. It's very pretty but needs a big room.

This sounds very much like a green sofa that went from San Simeon to the Examiner Building downtown about 1932 and then to the Beach House, later still to be sold through the Marion Davies auction at Parke-Bernet in December 1945. Hearst concluded his note to Morgan:

Perhaps we can plan it [a suitable room for the big green suite] when we make the next additions.

How are we getting on at Wyntoon?

It's reasonable to assume that some of these efforts were aimed at Hearst's upcoming birthday party in 1937—Santa Monica's famous circus masquerade of Saturday, May 1. More than a year's worth of remodeling was now in its very last stages. The Beach House was poised to be a grander showplace than ever before. Willicombe to Tom White, the general manager of Hearst Enterprises in New York, this being a telegram dated April 16:

Chief would like all the boys [his five sons] at birthday party. Will you tell them? Also will you suggest anyone else in East you think might like to come and should come out? Of course you will be here and [I] have already told Dick Berlin he is invited. Let me know how I can cooperate. Remember birthday [April] twenty-ninth but party Saturday May first.

The circus party, with Hearst as ringmaster, came and went, famously; of all the events held at the Beach House from the late 1920s on through the 1930s, none is better and more memorably documented.

THE FINANCIAL SNARL that Hearst ran into in 1937 is likewise well documented; we needn't rehash the details here (except to say that the indebtedness of \$126 million he supposedly faced is greatly exaggerated). W. A. Swanberg's *Citizen Hearst* and David Nasaw's much later book, *The Chief*, tell the story in wrenching detail. Suffice it to say regarding the Beach House, the Hearst of May 1937 was about to receive dire news from New York: belated Depression woes, nagging debts, too much corporate pork in the form of sub-par newspapers and other laggard holdings, plus plenty of agitated stockholders—in short, the equivalent of what we have today with subprime lenders like Countrywide having been brought to their knees. Until the ax fell, Hearst kept building, kept entertaining, kept collecting. He even planned to go to Europe in the summer of 1937, a plan quickly scotched. Marion spoke of their trip abroad in 1937 in *The Times We Had*, but she meant 1936; her reference to “doing *Cain and Mabel*” then and how she was “held over for more scenes” clinches it.

We saw how Hearst sought nostalgic stage photographs earlier in 1937; also, how he and Morgan were keen on beautifying the Beach House with antique furniture that would enhance their eighteenth-century theme. Furniture was always a staple for Hearst the collector; he had hundreds, even thousands of examples to choose from.

His floors needed rugs and carpets, a requirement in all his homes. The Los Angeles dealer D. H. Philibosian, whose name cropped up ten years earlier in the William Flannery days, had been courting Hearst in 1937. His efforts won him this reply from the Chief, who was

back at San Simeon after *Ever Since Eve* wrapped and after the big birthday party of May 1; the date of the following lines is Wednesday, May 5:

I will be glad to have you bring a selection of rugs to San Simeon for the rooms at Wyntoon of which you sent rough plans. We will be here for another week or so and you may come when it suits you.

2. Regarding these silk rugs you write about—I want to help you out all I can, but I must get rugs that I can use, and I cannot see any place where I can use these silk rugs.

They do not fit in the Beach House, there is no place for them here that I can see, and they certainly would be too fine for Wyntoon, where we need durable rugs.

When the bad financial tidings reached Hearst, he and Marion and Willicombe and a few others had to head to New York pronto. This was in late May 1937. They were moving so fast that Willicombe was still catching up on messages as they sped east by train through Arizona and New Mexico. Case in point, dated May 26—Willicombe to Randolph Apperson, manager of the San Simeon Ranch:

Confirming my telegram from here today [from Albuquerque, New Mexico], following are further instructions from Chief in connection with the closing of the Hilltop which he has just told me to send you. . . .

Chief has in mind to keep Wyntoon open during the summer [of 1937], live at Santa Monica in winter [1937–38], and not open the Hacienda [San Simeon] until Spring [of 1938].

The financial contortions and agonies that Hearst and his executives, editors, publishers, and many others went through were at their worst during the rest of 1937, through all of 1938, and through much of 1939 before the dust settled adequately. Again, we can speak well of W. A. Swanberg, who in 1961 in *Citizen Hearst* established the Hearst timeline and chronology that, with mostly minor exceptions, all Hearst aficionados have been following to this day. David Nasaw modernized Swanberg's work in 2000 with *The Chief*. Together, these

books tell enough about the dark years that Hearst endured in the late thirties. Our main concern, though, is the Beach House. We'll stick as closely to that subject as we can; as in this letter of Hearst's to Louis B. Mayer on June 6, 1937, sent from New York to Mayer's home address of 625 Ocean Front, Santa Monica:

I was glad to hear from you, but sorry to learn that you had been ill.

Louis, old man, you really invite illness working and worrying all the time, not only about your own problems but about the industry.

What good does it do? Nobody heeds your advice. Look at this latest scandal [involving a young woman who was raped at an MGM sales convention party, an incident successfully covered up in ensuing decades].

Geewhiz, Louis, do you realize how damaging that is to the whole moving picture industry and fraternity?

Of course the higher class companies were not concerned in this revel. But who knows that?

No names were mentioned, and you ask that no names shall be. All right, but what are the consequences of that policy?

The people do not know the little, unimportant companies which are responsible for such occurrences, but they do know the names of Metro, Paramount, Warner's, R. K. O., &c, and the people think it is one of the companies they DO know which is responsible.

The people do not know what person or persons are responsible, but they know you, Louis, and Joe Schenck, and Jack Warner, and Harry Cohen [Cohn], and Daryll [Darryl] Zanuck.

It is folks like you who CONSTITUTE the moving picture industry in the public mind, and who do actually constitute it, and who suffer most any slur on it.

You are not responsible, but you are HELD responsible.

Why do you not get together and prevent the thoughtless and the reckless from discrediting the industry and damaging the worthy people in it?

Why must the wise and worthy suffer from the obstinacy and stupidity of a few nincompoops?

Louis, I have always been fond of the industry, and always had vision to see its nobler side,—its immense educational and cultural value.

I am going to do everything I can now to help in this situation, of course.

But why do not you important and intelligent leaders do something to prevent such situations?

A little organization would do it—or do part of it. A committee to regulate entertainments, and keep them creditable and commendable would help, I should think.

You say the girl may not be all she should be. I do not know anything about that.

But the public will be sympathetic with a poor little extra girl, and they will believe that the party was “another one of those moving picture affairs,”— and no names being mentioned, they will suspect anybody and everybody, and condemn the whole industry.

It is too bad the newspapers have to print the news of the District Attorney’s proceedings [those of Buron Fitts], but as a matter of fact, however, the newspapers do NOT print all the news by a dam[n] site.

They generally considerately refrain from printing the full facts.

Guy Barham [d. 1922, former publisher of the *Los Angeles Herald*, Hearst’s evening paper in town] was once asked by a delegation of New York financiers what was the motto of his newspaper.

He said:

“Our motto is ‘We know the truth but we do not print it.’”

I guess this is a case where we will have to live up to Guy’s motto.

P-S By the way, why do you not persuade that picture magazine to stop that rotten stuff by Vanderbilt [probably Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr., publisher of the *Los Angeles Daily News* from 1923 to 1926].

Hearst wrote terrific letters. On June 18, 1937, in the midst of his and Marion’s financial comeuppance in New York, his recipient was Eleanor Patterson in Washington, D.C. “Cissy” was running Hearst’s morning paper in the capital city, the *Washington Herald*. She hailed from a newspapering family. Her brother, Joe (Joseph Medill

Patterson), ran the hugely successful tabloid in New York, the *Daily News* (it usually left Hearst's copycat *Daily Mirror* in the shade). Her cousin Bertie (Robert R. McCormick) ran the mighty *Chicago Tribune*:

Many thanks and yes indeedy. We will descend on you Monday [June 21] and destroy your peace and quiet. We are delighted to be asked.

I shall be pleased to see the President [FDR].

I am full of good advice which he does not need.

His letter went on much longer. The upshot of it was that the next day, June 19, he pleaded ill and cancelled the arrangements, saying he'd "been laid up for two days with a bad cold." He and Marion never saw President Roosevelt in 1937. Hearst's brief visit with him in October 1934 would stand as the last occasion. Would it have mattered? It's among the great "ifs" of Hearstiana. What if FDR *had* seen Hearst at San Simeon in 1932? What if Wendell Willkie *had* seen Hearst there—at the ranch, as was likewise planned—early in 1940?

Hearst wrote to Morgan in this vicinity as well, on June 20, 1937, telling her: "I think you would better conclude the work at Wyntoon." The same had been done already at San Simeon. Moreover, with Morgan's final entry in her Beach House "alterations" ledger for 1936–37 having been in April of the current year, nothing was happening in Santa Monica. A torpor soon descended on things. But as Hearst said in his letter to Morgan on June 20, "the whole program will have to go over until next year." He was buying time, that is. He was hardly down and out for the count, despite the "stop the presses" histrionics that color most accounts of his life during 1937.

How badly limping could Hearst and Marion have been? Evidently not very. On June 27, Joe Willicombe wired Hearst's private pilot, Allen Russell, at Union Airport in Burbank, not far from Warner Bros.-First National. "Chief would like you to be ready with new Vultee [airplane] in case he wants you to pick us up in Albuquerque [New Mexico] or Barstow [California]." Winslow, Arizona, proved to be the

place. Hearst had plenty of life in him yet, plenty of fight. At seventy-four, he still had Marion to keep him feeling young, some down and dour moments notwithstanding.

This whole latter-day venture of ours, this thing of reconstructing bits and pieces of famous people's lives is highly dependent on the existence, survival, and, above all, on the accessibility of old documents. George Loorz's message to Robert Peyton, an accountant in the Hearst Sunical office in San Francisco, couldn't be gloomier. It's dated July 9, 1937:

I regret that we will be unable to furnish any information for 1936. When we moved [in June] from our office on the hilltop we brought [down to Loorz's house in San Simeon village] only the 1937 records and destroyed all previous records. All were burned. . . .

I regret that we cannot supply this information. As you have copies of all payrolls of 1936 you will be able to work out the desired information [from them].

Loorz reinforced this point in writing to Morgan the same day, July 9:

As per instructions we destroyed all office records when we moved out of the office on the hill. We have only the records for 1937 which were needed to complete [some of the aforementioned things].

The stories that long ran rampant about Morgan's destruction of her office records—much blown out of proportion—trace back in some part at least to these events in the troubled year of 1937. "Yep, they burned up all them records," you can readily hear some grizzled coot saying, and saying it again, and saying it a hundredth time at the Old Timer's Day picnics of years past. Much confusion and myth-making has emerged from these spoken legends and their frequent reinforcement. Nonetheless, the idea that an architect and businesswoman of Morgan's stature was almost ceremonially destroying evidence of her life's work is preposterous, distorted beyond

all reason. The Morgan Collection at Cal Poly and, as much so or more, the private Morgan-Forney Collection have put the eternal lie to this. As for Hearst's records, the testimony given in 1999 by Willicombe's second wife, the much younger Jean Henry Willicombe, is especially telling. Mrs. Bissantz, her preferred name from a later marriage, asked about the Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library. When their extent was described, she smiled. "Hell," she chuckled softly, "they'd have had to build a whole damn *building* to hold all that there used to be of those things." It's surely true. The private Hearst archives in their most-intact prime, decades ago, were like the largest hordes of multi-term presidential papers. Their numbers at The Bancroft (somewhere in the low six-figures) are but a pittance, a hint, a suggestion. The same holds true of the George & Rosalie Hearst Collection, perhaps 50,000 strong, if "strong" can in fact be used here. And yet such holdings are mighty, indeed stupendous when measured against . . . *nothing*. So, yes. Certain papers were burned. Certain papers were filched or lost or walked off with or tossed aside. Certain papers, like George Loorz's Beach House records, are of unknown whereabouts today. Certain papers were preserved, according to divine plan or not. The search for them continues. This book or any book like it would be an impossibility otherwise.

THE IDEA THAT HEARST was reduced to near poverty in 1937, that his style was so cramped that he could barely lift a finger for months or even years, has also been greatly overblown. Yes, life changed for him. He got demoted from the kingly or imperial level to that of a mere prince or duke or baron—or whatever the royal analogy ought to be. To think for a minute, though, that he and Marion became paupers is ludicrous. A message from the Los Angeles rug dealer Philibosian to Joe Willicombe on July 12 is one of many that gives as much pause now as it would have done before Hearst's finances got dicey. So

complex, so convoluted were Philibosian's words that Willicombe had to translate them for Hearst (good thing, or we'd all be lost on this one). As Hearst was told by his astute secretary:

The offer to which Mr. Philibosian refers was to give you all of the rugs he brought here [to San Simeon] from which to make selections for Wyntoon—priced at \$12,705; also the two silk rugs (21' x 14' and 11' x 14') on which his last price was \$5,000—for \$10,000 or as he states, \$9,500 more than the \$520 you are paying for the ones selected by Miss Morgan. The list of rugs is attached.

The list of more than twenty Ispahans, Hamadans, Kirmans, Ardebils, Shirazes, Sarouks, and still other Persian types constituted the \$12,705 portion (nearly \$200,000 in today's money). The list concluded with "Two Silks at Beach House" for the \$5,000 Willicombe also mentioned.

Hearst's scrawl: "I would like to do something to help Philibosian but I don't know what we can do. His last proposal [of May 11, 1937] is the best if we can spend the money."

Always the *we*, the editorial *we*. From here on, such wording often denotes the latitude the man had through his personal accounts versus that which he'd formerly had through various corporate accounts, no longer at his *carte blanche* disposal. Still the way of a multi-millionaire, of a multi-billionaire today, never forget.

The clout that this undefeated monarch could still wield is numbing when encountered head on, as in this memorandum of July 17, 1937, addressed to all comers:

We are advised, and editors of all other papers are to be notified, that hereafter we are to refer to Cosmopolitan pictures as "Cosmopolitan" and not as "Warner Brothers Cosmopolitan"; also the we are not to give extraordinary promotion to every Warner Brothers production [as had been done since January 1935], but merely to handle their pictures,

stars, etcetera, largely as we would those of other studios, giving good reivevs [*sic*], of course, when the pictures warrant.

EVERY PAPER WILL BE ADVISED BY MR. HATRICK WHEN SPECIAL PROMOTION IS DESIRED FOR COSMOPOLITAN OR WARNER PRODUCTIONS.

This notice expresses no change of relationship to Warner Brothers, but merely restrains indiscriminate publicity which becomes routine and ineffective.

In fact, over-publicity even of Cosmopolitan productions is undesirable. Please exercise care and judgment, and use promotion space to the greatest possible advantage.

Only Hearst could have written such lines; and he alone could have claimed “no change of relationship to Warner Brothers” while Marion’s career lay in tatters.

There were indeed some tense moments in the summer of 1937. A distant relative of his, a schoolteacher in Los Angeles named Phoebe H. Hill, told Willicombe on July 19, “I was so distressed over Mr. Hearst’s appearance that I could not keep the tears back when I looked at him”:

It breaks my heart to have him so worried. We who care for him so much can do nothing to help him, in fact we only add to his burden. All we can do is to carry a prayer in our hearts that all will come out right.

I want to thank you for all you have done. Your [you’re] a friend indeed, and I am most grateful.

Willicombe answered Miss Hill’s letter of July 19 on July 22:

Mr. Hearst did look a little worn when he got here [from his long month in New York], but such rest as he has been able to get here has done him a lot of good, and he is looking and feeling better every day. . . .

So that you will understand this [domestic] situation, let me explain that instead of keeping a butler and housekeeper and chef here all the time, Mr. Hearst has adopted the plan of bringing up the butler and chef from the Beach House.

A couple of maids and housemen, who will be here when we leave [for Wynton], will be under the direction of Mr. [W. R.] Williams, who

will be in charge of the Hilltop [as well as the San Simeon warehouses, his main job since 1927].

Hearst rarely mentioned Marion in his correspondence with Julia Morgan—or Morgan in hers with him. August 7, 1937, made for a disarming departure, an avoidance of pointless formalities at this relatively late date in his life:

Miss Davies and I have been discussing the windows at the east end of the study [the Gothic Study on the third floor, the private Hearst-Davies section of Casa Grande].

Miss Davies thinks that they let in too much of a glare of light, and that the yellow tone of glass minimizing the glare would not be very attractive.

She advises stained glass for the windows. I am inclined to favor the stained glass.

We have so much stained glass [in the Bronx and San Simeon warehouses] that probably we could adapt some of it to these windows to make it set [be positioned] perfectly; and if we could not, we could fill out with a limited amount of modern stuff [so-called “extension work”].

What a breakthrough. We’re forcefully reminded that Marion, now forty years old, was as much at Hearst’s side as she’d ever been, that the welfare of San Simeon as a museum, a showplace, a grandiosity beyond compare was as important to her as it was to him. They must surely have convened similarly with regard to the Beach House, never mind the paucity of documentation.

CISSY PATTERSON, elitist publisher in Washington, D.C., leased the newly combined *Washington Herald* and *Washington Times* from Hearst, effective August 7, 1937. She ran the two papers as the *Times-Herald* until 1939; she then exercised her option to buy them from the Hearst interests; as a merged property, the *Times-Herald* was reminiscent of the *New York Journal-American*, another merger made

during the difficult summer that Hearst was now groping his way through. On October 23, 1937, Mrs. Patterson wrote to Willicombe at Wyntoon:

You know there was a great to-do about the unpopularity of the Hearst papers in Washington. My name has been thrown around town until the very sight of it makes me sick. Nevertheless, although our circulation increases are very fine indeed, there is certainly no increase of cash in the till-box. . . .

If Mr. Hearst and Marion are thinking of going to San Simeon won't you please let me know. Maybe he will let me slip out and "surprise" him.

Cissy's letter had to go cross country to reach Wyntoon. A message from the *San Francisco Examiner*, dated October 26, 1937, probably got there almost as fast; this to Willicombe: "We have sent the material for the Halloween party":

No doubt you will want George [Eckert, the butler late of the Beach House] to go over these to see whether or not they meet his requirements, so that we do not find ourselves in an embarrassing position in the last-minute rush.

Life on the McCloud River appeared to be good, stable, suitably Hearstian. Willicombe answered Mrs. Patterson in Washington three days before Halloween, on Thursday, October 28:

About that surprise! Why the ranch [San Simeon]? Here we are deep down among the towering pines at the foot of snow-capped [Mt.] Shasta, inspecting our skates and skis,—and well, why not "surprise" here?

Chief and Marion would be delighted to see you—we will probably be here another month—have been here two already—so just telegraph when you will arrive.

**BUT MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL—HERE'S WHAT CHIEF
WOULD LIKE IN THE WAY OF A LITTLE SURPRISE:
THIS IS A MESSAGE TO YOU FROM HIM:**

“I would like tremendously to be surprised on the trip to HONOLULU, sailing on the *Lurline* December 10—spending Christmas there and returning. Wouldn’t it be grand to have you surprise us and come along.”

If I may make a suggestion, why not make it a double surprise—Slip out to Wyntoon—

Slip along to Waikiki.

When you come out here, you [and the Chief] can talk over everything.

Well—why *shouldn’t* Cissy Patterson have slipped out to Wyntoon and then sailed to Waikiki? Hearst and Marion needed to clear out of Dodge for a month before December 31. The six-month law had been modified, possibly through Hearst’s string pulling in Sacramento, to three months for the non-resident tax exemption; they already had two months in the bank in 1937, courtesy of their whereabouts in January and June. So, yes, a cruise to Honolulu would do the trick just fine.

Nonetheless, the Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library contain the following item:

Regret extremely inability to avail myself of your home which you so kindly tendered. Sorry for any inconvenience caused you. Hope for some future trip to your lovely islands, and to have the very great pleasure of seeing you.

That was Hearst by cable to a man named Chris Holmes. His message had gone from New York on December 15, 1937, to Honolulu, Hearst and Marion having fallen back on the Ritz Tower as the best place to accrue the rest of their ninety days that year of California non-residency.

Fine and well, but what about this fellow Chris Holmes?

Leave it to Hayes Perkins. Holmes was related to Max Fleischmann, the wealthy yeast king of Santa Barbara and, like Hearst, a man who was interested in exotic animals, as Holmes also was.

Perkins touched on these subjects in his diary. All the same, we can let sleeping hyenas lie. The Holmes part appears in the late-twenties portion of the often bizarre compilation by Perkins, and we're almost ready now to move into 1938.

Before Hearst and Marion headed east, rather than far to the west, they stopped in Los Angeles (in turn, they soon flew to Ensenada, Mexico, as a photo in *The Times We Had* shows, though only to add a day or two's worth of out-of-state credits to their final tally). On November 19, 1937, Hedda Hopper, poised at last to become a full-fledged gossip columnist after years as a minor actress, checked in with her good friends:

My dear W. R.:

Can't tell you how sorry I was not to be able to come up to Winton [sic]. But I've been on a sort of merry-go-round. I've signed up to do a Daily Column on Hollywood for ESQUIRE FEATURES, and am about to ask a very great favor of you.

Would it be too much trouble for you to write me a note wishing me well in my coming venture? I need hardly tell you what I want it for, but I remember how kind you were when I wrote those pieces for the Washington paper [at Cissy Patterson's urging], which prompts me to impose on your good nature again.

So happy that you and Marion are home again [at the Beach House, however briefly]. Now maybe we'll have the pleasure of seeing you.

She signed off "with the greatest admiration and love."

Hopper seemed well positioned now to do battle with the likes of Jimmie Fidler and especially that Hearst mainstay, Louella Parsons. There was one hitch. She'd be appearing in Hearst's arch-rival paper in the Southland, the Chandler family's *Los Angeles Times*.

THE FINAL ACT for Julia Morgan at the Beach House—identifiable as the "Garden Terraces" job—officially began on December 1, 1937, with

this simple entry: “Blue Prints.” Their cost was a mere \$1.10, an amount followed on January 1, 1938, by more blueprints, these to the tune of sixty cents. The largest cost entries on this job were her travel dates in 1938: March 12 (\$10), April 13 (\$15), and May 21 (\$20). The evenly stepped increases were apparently coincidental. Also, \$55 in drafting-room time got entered under April 30.

Otherwise, it was a small job, a minuscule job, good for \$178.29 in total office costs against \$198.44 in Hearst’s payments through August 1938, whereupon the account was closed. This time, in other words, Morgan made only a shade more than \$20 profit.

For old-school interpreters of the Hearst-Morgan phenomenon—those still stuck in the thinking of the 1960s or 1970s who insist on pointing to Morgan’s habit of working for paltry sums—here’s delectable grist for their unattuned mills. The newer, bigger picture has it that Morgan’s Beach House costs in 1938 were \$177.19 (if carried forward, the \$1.10 from December 1937 increases this amount to the \$178.29 just cited). Either way—\$177.19 or \$178.29—those figures represent a mere 1% of her total operating costs in 1938. Wyntoon at \$5,560 in costs (rounded to the nearest whole dollar) was poised to be her biggest income-producer. San Simeon followed at \$2,805 in operating costs. The Allan Starr residence in Piedmont was next in line at \$2,384.

All such costs when subtracted from Morgan’s commission payments yielded her basic profit on a given job. On San Simeon, for instance, she collected \$6,600 from Hearst in 1938. It would be simplistic to say that she therefore earned \$3,795 that year on San Simeon (\$6,600 less \$2,805); and yet a full auditing of her ledgers would surely take us in that direction. So the Garden Terraces job in Santa Monica, comprising 1% of her total costs in 1938 and a profit of just \$20, was decidedly small. However, that name alone—Garden Terraces—will soon have significance for us, as we’ll see several pages

from now. As far as the man who stood behind this new Beach House job: same old, same old. "Mr. W. R. Hearst, 1060 So. Broadway, Los Angeles." It was same old, same old also in that nary a peep was made about Marion.

Meanwhile, the new year found George Loorz having established a more secure home base for himself in Pacific Grove, next to Monterey and Carmel. His plan, approved by Hearst and Morgan, was to run the lingering work at San Simeon from there; the new Big Sur coast highway invited scenic commuting, and Loorz liked to drive fast. Mudslides permitting, he could make weekly trips from Pacific Grove to San Simeon, just as Morgan had so often done from even farther-removed San Francisco, another two hours up the line. Morgan kept a modest second home in Monterey, a mile or two from where the Loorz family landed on its well-paid feet, thanks to the big salary Hearst had provided George Loorz since 1932. On top of that, Loorz the unstoppable go-getter had done almost land-office business as a private building contractor in the greater area around San Simeon and elsewhere in San Luis Obispo County, again with Hearst and Morgan's approval. They both knew a man with bold and relentless vision when they saw one. Besides, Loorz was now almost forty. Yet he acted as if he were fifty or even older. Such was the legacy of the Great War veterans (he was among them) who grew up fast in the late 1910s, who left their rural boyhoods behind forever more, and who seldom looked back or slowed down for a single minute once they got home from the trenches or, for some, from the bordellos in Paris.

An old friend of Loorz's wrote to him on January 4, 1938. "From various sources I have heard that 'Hearst Construction ain't what she used to be.'" The man's letter went to Loorz in Pacific Grove from 1209 N. La Brea Avenue in Los Angeles:

I presume that contracting in the San Luis Obispo area is taking more of your time than ever now. It's a good thing you worked up that field, when you did [as of 1935].

Oh, mercy. A good thing indeed. Loorz answered his friend in Los Angeles on January 18:

Yes, I have managed to get quite a lot of work [besides that for Hearst and Morgan]. At present we [the F. C. Stolte Co., in which Loorz held a half interest] are completing the King City Grammar School, [are] ready for the plaster on the San Benito Co[unty] Hospital [in Hollister, near Salinas and Gilroy], [are] pouring concrete on the City Hall at Santa Cruz, [are] framing a good-sized gym at Campbell [near San Jose], [and are] beginning operations on a large school in Alameda, besides odds and ends.

Loorz lived and thrived in an era that knew not the expression "conflict of interest." What on earth would Hearst or Morgan have thought if they'd known?

In fact they did know, as indicated a moment ago. Here's what Hearst thought about it. Loorz had asked him for a letter of recommendation, just as Hedda Hopper had a couple of months earlier. Hearst complied on February 4, 1938:

I shall be very happy to have you refer anyone to me regarding the high quality of your construction work at San Simeon.

I have had the most complete satisfaction with everything that you have supervised and executed.

You have been most careful, not only about the quality of the construction, but about the cost.

And now the kicker, Hearst's final paragraph, choice words all of them:

I cannot imagine it possible for anyone to be more competent and conscientious, and I am glad to testify to that effect.

Coming from Hearst, who could be so hard to please, Loorz got more than he asked for. He surely didn't need those words to get ahead; it was a formality only. He left the letter in its original envelope, as any of us might also treat a precious family keepsake. His sons discovered it long after their father died in 1978; Loorz's widow had kept it close at hand until her death in 1989. If only the Beach House papers that George Loorz salted away in the late twenties had turned up in the same way. This book would be unimaginably different.

Julia Morgan had work to do at San Simeon early in 1938; the period belonged to far more, that is, than the Garden Terraces in Santa Monica. She brought Loorz up to date on February 8, soon after her latest trip to the rain-drenched hilltop (a stormy, even violent winter was 1937–38, with the more-placid Santa Monica coastal area being especially hard hit). "We are no longer a part of 'Sunical,' but are to work directly under Mr. Hearst as employer." So went Morgan's explanation to Loorz. Translation: no more corporate largesse, no more shell games of bills getting sent to the *Los Angeles Examiner* or God knows where else for auditing and, oftentimes, for excruciatingly slow payment. Hearst still had an income, albeit a much-reduced one through arrangements he and his advisors and executives made in 1937. It was through that personal rather than anonymous corporate income that San Simeon, Wyntoon, and, running a distant third, the Beach House would get renewed attention now that Hearst was back in California. He and Marion had done their mandatory three-months penance, albeit by the piecemeal approach—almost good at one point for a voyage to Hawaii, of all the amazing things.

IN THE FIRST PART of 1938 Hearst and Marion were back at San Simeon mostly, from early in January through the last week of April; it was a stay for them nearly equaling the almost unbroken one they'd logged in 1934–35. What was Hearst up to in that part of 1938? Some

examples, starting with January 18; Willicombe to all Hearst editors around the country (there were still plenty of them, even after the financial bloodletting of the previous summer and fall):

Chief asks that you give some publicity to remarks of James Cromwell [husband of Doris Duke] before House Ways and Means Committee this afternoon advocating reduction of income and other capital taxes to 1929 levels.

Ah, so taxes concerned the Chief. Of course they did. The new “wealth taxes” cooked up by FDR and his Washington bean counters would have concerned anyone in Hearst or Marion’s position.

Another example; this message on Wednesday, January 19, was one sent to Willicombe from the main Hearst office in Los Angeles:

Mr. and Mrs. [Raoul] Walsh on *Daylight Limited* arriving [San Luis Obispo] 12:51 [p.m.].

Yes, the principals kept surrounding themselves with good company (for them that meant lively, upbeat, positive, amusing people, like the swashbuckling Walshes of Beverly Hills, proponents of the new Hollywood Park Racetrack, a hotbed of wickedness as far as Hearst was privately concerned). He and Marion still had dealings with Warner Bros. on a range of levels. January 20 (Julia Morgan’s sixty-sixth birthday) brought the equivalent for 1938 of today’s rapid-fire, ephemeral e-mail, courtesy of Ella Williams in Hollywood:

Shipping tonight [Busby Berkeley’s] *Hollywood Hotel*; must be returned Warner Studio Saturday morning [the 22nd].

Ella Williams (Bill Williams to insiders) served as Ed Hatrick’s assistant whenever Hat was on the coast. She was also part social secretary, part all-around gofer for the greater good of Marion and at times for the Chief. Hat wired Hearst from Miami, Florida, on January 20:

[Bill] Williams has advised me regarding letter you sent her. I plan to leave here next Thursday [January 27] but think it most important that I talk to Harry [Warner] before leaving for [the] coast. He arrives in New York today and will be there three weeks. In the event he is not interested in renewing agreement [with Warner Bros.] then will take it up with [Nicholas] Schenck [of Loew's-MGM]. It will also be necessary to extend Cosmopolitan agreement with [news]papers which expires next year. Is this program satisfactory?

These longer messages often require lots of interpretation and expounding to grasp their full meaning. If all we gain in casual passing is that Hearst's business life in the entertainment industry was far from over in 1938, that may be enough. Willicombe to two of Hearst's editors in New York; these words on January 21:

The Radio City Music Hall in New York has asked that the time for showing of *Gold is Where You Find It*, a Cosmopolitan motion picture in color [through Warner Bros.], be moved up so that it may be shown soon.

They are eager to get it, Chief says it is really a wonderful picture, and he would like the New York papers to give it the good publicity that its excellence merits.

Papers outside of New York are requested by him to do likewise when the picture is shown in their respective sections. All the papers should give this picture special attention as they did with *Submarine D-1* [a Cosmopolitan-Warners production late in 1937].

Hearst himself weighed in on January 26 by wiring Jack Malloy, one of his all-time favorite editors, who was currently working in Boston:

I don't know a thing about contents or quality of story but I think late Jean Harlow's unpublished novel *Today is Tonight* properly promoted would be circulation builder for your afternoon papers. I understand Metro [MGM] has just bought movie rights from Mrs. Bello [Jean's mother, Jean having died in 1937].

Hearst had his sights set higher all the while, as in this directive through Willicombe on January 30, dispatched through King Features Syndicate in New York:

Referring to the Lillian Hellman column on war in Spain which Walter Winchell wants to run, Chief says:

“I must ask all columnists to keep off these highly controversial subjects.

“There is no occasion to go to Spain to project ourselves into a war between Communists and Fascists.

“Let us pay attention to our own democracy here in America.”

It is important that all columnists understand Chief’s wishes in this matter. Will you kindly see that they do.

And as for Lillian Hellman selling her column elsewhere, Chief says:

“Let her sell it.”

On the same day that Hearst wrote his praiseworthy letter of recommendation to George Loorz, February 4, 1938, he had these two matters on his mind as well:

Let us have strong editorials calling for Nicaragua Canal. We have fought for this for forty years. Maybe [it could be] an editorial for Sunday. . . .

[Also an] editorial supporting Mr. [Joseph P.] Kennedy’s demand for [a] government-owned merchant marine.

A further matter he addressed on February 4 had more local implications; this to the two men who headed up round-the-clock efforts at the *Los Angeles Examiner*:

Please make strong editorial supporting [Buron] Fitts [for his re-election as District Attorney of Los Angeles County]. Let us also align ourselves with the churches and religious bodies in fight against vice, crime and graft.

The follow-through on this came as soon as February 6; Willicombe to Hearst’s main editors at the “two *Examiners*,” those in Los Angeles and in San Francisco:

Confirming telephone message, Chief wishes the papers to align themselves with the church federation and other religious and civic bodies in the crusade against vice and crime and graft.

“The state and cities need a thorough house cleaning,” Chief said, “primarily of corrupt politicians.”

Chief liked very much the editorial a few days ago in *Los Angeles Examiner* commending District Attorney Fitts in his efforts to cleanse the community.

And then this on Tuesday, February 15, from Hearst to some renowned Hollywood insiders:

To Messrs. Joseph M. Schenck, Charles R. Rogers, Harry Cohn and Jack L. Warner:

Louis B. Mayer has always made an admirable success of every activity he has engaged in. His life is full of splendid achievements.

I would always be happy to join in any testimonial to his exceptional ability and vision, and would take much pleasure in attending the dinner in his honor on February twenty-fourth if it were possible for me to do so.

Unfortunately I will not be in Los Angeles the latter part of February and cannot, therefore, accept your kind invitation personally to attend the dinner.

Nevertheless, I will be with you in spirit in all enthusiasm.

Had Hearst and Marion attended that dinner, three lives may have been saved. On that very date—Thursday the 24th—Lord and Lady Plunket and their pilot crashed near the San Simeon airstrip, killing the three of them and casting a far worse pall over the place than the death of Bernard Douras had cast upon the Beach House in 1935 or than young Margaret Ehrlich’s death had imparted in 1936. Life went on, regardless; and Hearst’s view of both the nearby and the distant world continued apace. Two days before the fatal Plunket crash, Willicombe had alerted all editors in the Hearst service:

Chief calls your attention to subtitle quoting Hitler under his picture on first page yesterday. It is not an exact quotation. Chief instructs to tell

all papers to ask their copy readers to be absolutely accurate in every word when quotations are made.

Three days after the Plunkets' death, Willicombe reminded us why major parts of this book about the Beach House have been possible at all. Willicombe to his main clerk in Los Angeles, Helen Baldwin, stationed at the *Examiner* on South Broadway:

Sending you the files tonight [Sunday] by express. We will be down there Tuesday morning [March 1]. Do not send any more mail [to San Simeon], of course. Please get busy on files immediately, putting them in our regular folders. It is important to have this done promptly and accurately, so please be extremely careful as well as diligent. Thank you.

Also on Sunday the 27th, Willicombe alerted Tom White, one of Hearst's top lieutenants, of the latest news:

Chief going on noon train Monday to Los Angeles probably for few days.

What a demotion! Hearst would be taking the *train*, not flying to Burbank or to Grand Central in Glendale or to Clover Field in Santa Monica, as had been his wont for the past decade or more. (Indeed, it wouldn't be long before he'd be selling the Vultee airplane he bought less than a year before.) Regardless, nearly three weeks was more like it for Hearst's stint in Los Angeles, not just the few days that Willicombe predicted. The party hunkered down at the Beach House throughout that period, returning to San Simeon by the weekend of March 19-20.

HEARST AND MARION arrived in Santa Monica just in time for some of Southern California's most ruinous flooding in years. The worst moments were on Sunday and Monday, February 27 and 28, continuing into Tuesday, March 1. There was no sign of Miss Morgan during that touch-and-go stretch. San Simeon was equally hard hit; the entire southern half of the state got a violent dousing. Morgan finally appeared in Santa Monica on March 23, after a stop at the ranch to see

the newly returned Hearst. Her stop at the Beach House coincided with a message from Willicombe to the editor of the *Los Angeles Examiner*:

Chief says Singapore-Siam-Japan map is okey except for color of Siam. He instructs since we have no good color for Siam we might leave it white or nearly so—then we could give the heavy green to the Dutch. Returning map tonight by express.

2. Have asked butler at Beach House (Geo Eckert) to bring you in the highways map which Chief left there with notations on your letter and on map.

The next day, March 24, Hearst heard from Joe Connolly, head of King Features Syndicate in New York:

In accordance with your wishes we shall try to get [Sidney] Skolsky to release us now from our agreement which expires in October. I want to say in all sincerity, however, that Erskine Johnson is dull and is not likely to attract circulation for any paper outside of California. His rewrites of press agent hand-outs are no more interesting than any of the other material coming out of Hollywood.

In my judgment he is neither a good writer nor entertaining. Non-Hearst editors to whom we tried to sell the column regarded it as an unimportant feature.

Hearst heard again from Joe Connolly of King Features Syndicate on March 25:

Mr. [Ed] Hatrick wired on March 14th "I wired [C. B.] Stratton [of Cosmopolitan Productions, New York] today to tell you it was okay to go ahead with the *Blondie* deal from Columbia [Pictures] as far as I am concerned."

Your telegram asking us to hold up this proposition was received on March 23rd. We have not signed the contract for *Blondie*. We do not own *Blondie* but we have a fifty-percent interest in it.

[Nate] Spingold [vice-president] of Columbia who agreed to all terms of our contract now demands signature on our personal assurance that deal was okay after receipt of Hatrick telegram.

If Hatrick can improve deal would appreciate he act quickly because we have other deals with Columbia depending upon this one.

Dagwood Bumstead would be played by the former radio Dagwood, Arthur Lake, who was “family” now with Hearst and Marion, inasmuch as he’d married Marion’s niece, Pat Van Cleve (at San Simeon, in fact) in 1937. The Lakes will assume some prominence in later pages of this book.

For now, though, a Santa Monica question. Willicombe to the *Los Angeles Examiner* on this same date, March 25:

How many breakwaters are there in Santa Monica and where are they located?

A great deal of sand had been swept away in the floods three weeks before, hence the question, which was posed by Hearst; and thus this later query from Willicombe on the 25th as well:

It develops that when Chief said “breakwater” he was referring not to the breakwater but to the jetty that extends out near the Thalberg house [707 Ocean Front, Santa Monica, south of 415 and 321 Ocean Front], the purpose of which is to prevent washing away beach to the northward. The idea is that this should be lengthened and strengthened. Kindly proceed [along] that line. Thanks.

Hearst had local matters in mind once more on April 2. He wired the *Los Angeles Examiner* as follows:

We can stop daily prods of [Sheriff Eugene] Biscailuz, but I still will have no confidence in him until he accomplishes something. I consider him just a palavering politician.

That wasn’t exactly what the biographers Lindley Bynum and Idwal Jones had in mind in 1950 with *Biscailuz: Sheriff of the New West*. To hear Hearst tell it, Biscailuz was just another lawman from the rough-and-tumble *Old West*.

More local matters on Monday, April 11; Willicombe to the *Examiner* on Hearst's behalf:

Chief appreciates the attention you have been giving to the Santa Monica jetty matter. He says OK and thanks regarding your letter of March 30th, which I showed him.

A week later (Julia Morgan had stopped at the Beach House in the meantime, right after conferring with Hearst at San Simeon), Willicombe had another Santa Monica matter to pursue; he did so through his main clerical assistant, Helen Baldwin, on April 18:

Please telephone Miss [Ella] Williams and ask her if she has any prices on tents, etc., for party, and send them over printer.

The party he meant was of course Hearst's birthday celebration, his milestone seventy-fifth, slated to be held at the Beach House on Saturday, April 30. By Monday the 25th, the time was drawing near for the Hearst-Davies entourage to relocate in Santa Monica for the historic occasion. Willicombe to "Cobbie" (the editor-publisher Edmond D. Coblentz), whom Hearst had sent on temporary assignment to Boston:

Please airmail copies of morning and evening for few days [the *Boston Daily Record* and the *Boston Evening American*]. Going to Los Angeles tonight and returning to ranch in about week.

The last of the grand costume parties for a Hearst birthday in the 1936–1938 period (there was one more at San Simeon in 1940) brought Hollywood out in droves. The moment is well recalled through photographs of Hearst, who went as President James Madison, plus many other images of those in the inner circle, Hearst's five sons included. Ouida Rathbone's feature of 1972 in *Esquire* treats of the subject; so does Ken Murray's book *The Golden Days of San Simeon*, dating from 1971; and of course *The Times We Had*, dating from 1975.

In an undated exchange between Hearst and Willicombe, assigned to April 1938 by John F. Dunlap in his book, *The Hearst Saga*, Hearst's reference to "the new garden" calls to mind Morgan's last job at 415 Ocean Front, the one identified as Garden Terraces. As Hearst put it:

The beach house party should be done economically, I think \$2,500 should do for construction—the tent, an Indian village on the new garden—maybe a couple of canoes on the pool—maybe a carrousel Indian style in the village—a tepee with a fortune teller. \$2,500 should also be enough for [the] actual party—\$1,000 for food. \$1,000 for liquor and \$500 for music. Talk it over with Miss [Ella] Williams and see that we do not exceed this amount—if possible keep under it. Tell George [Eckert, the butler] he must go easy—don't do expensive things. Give 'em [the guests] plenty of simple fare—with beer and highballs—and but little wine—not an expensive cake. It must be done this way or we will not have it.

Willicombe tendered a lengthy response, questioning how realistic it would be to meet Hearst's expectations at those prices. The Colonel concluded:

It would be best, I think for you or Marion to indicate the limit on these items—and then we will simply have to run the party within those limits.

"Back came Hearst's terse hand-written edict," as John Dunlap phrased his lead-in in *The Hearst Saga*:

We are only going to have \$5,000 [to spend] and will cut our cloth accordingly.

I suggest	\$1,000 food
	\$1,000 liquor
	\$1,000 tent, etc.
	\$1,000 construction, etc.
	\$1,000 help, etc.

And so the party went forth on that Sunday eve. A grand time was had by all, never mind that Norma Shearer's portrayal of Marie Antoinette conflicted with the Americana theme.

Ray Van Gorden, a longtime employee at San Simeon under Julia Morgan, had these details for George Loorz on May 4, the Wednesday following the big party:

Mr. Hearst and Miss Davies arrived at 5 p.m. yesterday and Bill & Randolph & wives [Lorelle and Catherine] at about noon. They are all that are here for the present. That surely was some party they had at Santa Monica. 300 guests in all—it seemed [that] about all the picture colony of Hollywood [attended] besides his newspaper men.

Four days later, May 8, in writing to the draftsman Warren McClure, Loorz was less forgiving in speaking of Hearst. He told Mac the following about the Chief:

Frankly he did not look to[o] happy and well to me. Perhaps the reaction from an exciting party on his birthday, together with the various and sundry ramifications that always accompany such parties.

Alice Head would soon be arriving from overseas and would offer her dependably unique view of things. As Willicombe informed the Los Angeles office on May 11:

Miss Head of London arrives in Los Angeles next Saturday morning [May 14] on the Union Pacific streamliner *City of Los Angeles*. The train is due in the Southern Pacific station at eight o'clock in the morning. Chief would like her immediately to get on the *Daylight* for the ranch. . . .

Get a reservation T O D A Y for her on the *Daylight* Saturday. Those reservations, especially on Saturday, are not easy—that is why I want you to get it T O D A Y.

Please meet Miss Head with the reservation and RR ticket Saturday morning and see that she and her bags get safely on the *Daylight*. Then confirm over [tele]printer.

Willicombe said in addition, in a separate message to the same underling in Los Angeles:

Have told Miss Head that if she prefers, Chief says OK for her to go to Beach House and rest for day before coming to ranch.

But get the reservation and meet her just the same.

When you meet her ask her what she wants to do. If she wants to go to beach, take her there and arrange [adjust] reservation, etc., whenever she wants it.

Miss Head's version, as recounted in her memoir of 1939, went like this:

One more night in the train [from Chicago], and at eight a.m. the next morning we slowly drew into Los Angeles. I had been awake since dawn watching the familiar orange groves and plum and peach orchards. The train for San Luis Obispo left in fifteen minutes. I had only just time to hurry aboard, leaving my luggage to be looked after in the usual competent American manner, which ensures its safe delivery at your destination. . . .

The train on the South[ern] Pacific Railway from Los Angeles to San Francisco, known as the "Daylight," provides another example of exceptionally comfortable travel.

She said nothing of going "to beach," as Willicombe had tersely put it. She went straight up the coast instead. She soon found that "Mr. Hearst was his usual kind and delightful self." Not a single contrary word to corroborate what Looz had said a week earlier. Of course, a week can be a long time for anyone, not the least for a man as resilient as Hearst. As Miss Head recounted things:

Because I missed being present at his birthday party, he gave me a photograph of himself which I shall always treasure on account of the inscription.

It probably showed him playing James Madison. Alas, she didn't say what President Hearst had written for her.