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Absentee Hollywoodians

1939

RIGHT BEFORE THE Hearst-Davies entourage left San Simeon in favor of Wyntoon, Hearst and Julia Morgan had some correspondence very much worth our looking at. Hearst had ordered the so-called Bear Fountain that's still at Wyntoon today, the work of a female sculptor in Germany named Hanna Gaertner, who happened also to be Jewish. Morgan alluded to that when, based on her recent trip to Sicily and environs, she told Hearst on June 7, 1939:

While in Italy, I came across a number of such cruel instances of similar treatment of her co-religionists—people of such fine quality, that the cruelty of it all makes one unhappy to think of it, particularly when there is so little a person like myself could possibly do.

Morgan referred to Miss Gaertner's work for Hearst; the artist would soon be completing the commission:

I like the fountain very much and think that it is ideal for Wyntoon. It would be very interesting if the sculptress could have the opportunity to see it erected as well as to “unveil” it.

In fact, Miss Gaertner would have that opportunity in 1940. This sort of correspondence is a refreshing departure from the letters in which Morgan had to be chasing payments from Hearst. Enough of those exist to give the impression—as they have many people—that monetary troubles were chronic in her relationship with him. In reality, it was all just part of the “architecting” business, as Morgan herself might have said. The Morgan-Forney Collection discloses some non-Hearst situations where Morgan had to tangle with slow-paying or

obstinate or even untrustworthy customers, quite over and above the problems that Hearst sometimes posed. The larger view like that is important to have. Morgan took it all in stride, the same as he did; such bumps along the road were not enough to topple either of them.

Morgan finished her short letter of June 7, 1939, by telling Hearst, "If there is anything you can think of that I can do, I would appreciate your letting me know." You have to wonder if either of them paused to reflect that the twentieth anniversary of their work on San Simeon was nearly at hand.

Morgan touched on similar themes when she wrote to Hearst again two days later, on June 9:

Anything at all that I can do personally, or attend to personally, I will be only too happy to do, as always.

However, there is with me in my small way, as with you in your large one, a necessity of keeping track of expenses.

It might be well to say that you have been asked to pay for no unexecuted work for many years back, in fact [from] before we made the working drawings for Mount Olive at Wyntoon [starting in 1931]. You realize thinking back the many projects we have developed together, that I could have had no profit in these years and I have not wanted it.

What Morgan meant is that she had had no profit in those situations, which were in the minority, where work had never been carried out. In 1931 the unexecuted, unpaid-for drawings for Mount Olive represented 4.5% of her office expenses for the year, whose total stood at \$61,780. A full thirty percent of that amount had been generated by San Simeon alone—all of which had been paid for and obviously would have to have been for Morgan to stay solvent, not to mention if she were to remain ensconced in the prestigious Merchants Exchange in San Francisco, a building whose office rent was far from cheap. (Walter Steilberg did without an office in the city for that very

reason: he found it much more prudent to display his architect-engineer shingle in Berkeley instead.)

This bears being pointed out now, this one clause of Morgan's from a letter that represents a few minutes dictation to Lil Forney, her secretary, this innocuous letter about Morgan's having had no profit; it's pertinent because here is a letter that's been seized upon by students, aficionados, scholars, and others as proof of Morgan's self-effacing ways, as though she were a mendicant who wore a sign saying "Abuse Me, For I Am Unworthy." The Morgan-Forney financial data punctures the balloon, dispels the fallacy, the "Morgan myth" as *Building for Hearst and Morgan* elucidates it.

For now, in this book about the Santa Monica connection, our setting the Hearst-Morgan record straight remains to be done for a new audience. Namely, Morgan got paid by Hearst, and she got paid well. She could never have traveled if she hadn't, could never have had a second home in Monterey, could never have taken on many a small or medium job on which she didn't mind making little, when such was her wont, as indeed it sometimes was. She could never have done any of these things without Hearst's largesse, without the trickle-down from his level.

So, yes, Morgan wanted to get compensated for unpaid work on the Mount Olive drawings. A loose end, a technicality between her and Hearst. That's all that her third paragraph in her letter of June 9 meant. Her fourth and final paragraph went like this:

As regards Mr. [Mac] McClure—on my return this Spring [from Europe] he told me that he wished to remain with the office but would like an arrangement allowing him to come and go at our convenience so that he could try out his shop experiment. I know him well enough to realize that he does not like too long [of a] confinement to our city office and so use him on outside work as [much as] is possible.

Mac's "shop experiment" brings his address on the Westside to mind: 11759 San Vicente Boulevard in Brentwood, a small commercial office space to this day. What he contemplated was evidently the buying and selling of antiques, a venture that never got off the ground for him until the mid-1950s in Santa Barbara, a few years after Hearst died. Until then, Mac proved to be too invaluable to Hearst and Marion. Except during the worst months of World War II, they almost always had things for him to do, first at Wyntoon, later at San Simeon, and, as stated in the previous chapter, ultimately in Beverly Hills.

Hearst answered Morgan on June 10 from San Simeon:

I realize fully that everything has been most delightful and most liberal [between us over these past twenty years], and I of course would, if it were possible, prefer to have it continue on the same basis.

But circumstances demand the most limited possible expenditure on my part.

In fact, for the rest of the year I must not contemplate anything of consequence.

Obviously, that meant not only at Wyntoon but also at San Simeon and in Santa Monica.

Morgan kept the exchange going. She wrote to Hearst again on June 12:

It will be perfectly all right with us, as I have explained to Mr. McClure, if you will pay him for as long as you need him—or I will do so and you can reimburse [me] exactly so as to keep his office insurances, employment records, etc., here clear.

Thus did Hearst and Morgan facilitate the transition of Mac McClure from what had technically been his status as a draftsman in the Morgan office to that of an independent contractor (still a draftsman) on Hearst's private payroll—akin to what William Flannery's status had been in 1926 when work began in Santa Monica.

THERE WAS NO QUESTION in Hearst's mind what the cash-flow problem was all about, both for him and for many others: taxes, pernicious, pervasive, confiscatory taxes, courtesy of the New Deal in Washington. He was undoubtedly right. A shift of five or ten percent in his favor would have allowed for modest budgets on his three beloved jobs, San Simeon, Wyntoon, and Santa Monica (Jolon was being eliminated altogether, since the Hearst Corporation would soon be selling that acreage to the federal government, complete with the Milpitas Hacienda as its centerpiece).

The Southland cropped up for Hearst periodically, aside from his newspaper work and despite his pleasant exile hundreds of miles north at Wyntoon; this on July 16 from a man whose wire address was given as Pasadena:

Naturally as one of California's leading citizens we are reserving boxes for you at the Call To The Nations For Moral Rearmament at the Hollywood Bowl on Wednesday July nineteenth at eight p.m. How many boxes would you like reserved for you and your friends on that evening? Please wire me at 1131 North Highland Ave Hollywood.

Wherever Hearst and Marion were, the business of the Hearst newspapers and other companies followed them; the duo wasn't merely on vacation. Hearst consequently heard from Larry Mitchell, a Los Angeles attorney for him and Marion, on July 19:

Notice is hereby given that a special meeting of the Board of Directors of Hearst Consolidated Publications, Inc. will be held at Wyntoon, McCloud, California Tuesday, July Twenty-fifth, Nineteen Thirty-nine at ten o'clock pm. For the following purposes: One to consider and act upon the proposed Chicago merger [the *Herald-Examiner* and *Evening American*]; Two to receive and act upon reports of committees and company representatives; Three to elect of [f]icers and appoint committeemen; Four to arrange for company offices; Five to consider

and act upon matters of management; Six to fill vacancies in personnel if any; Seven to consider and act upon contracts; Eight to consider and act upon such other and further business as may be presented to the meeting for the consideration of the Board.

Larry Mitchell was virtual “family” in that he and Ethel Davies, the next to oldest of Marion’s three sisters (Marion was the baby of the foursome) had been romantically linked for the past several years. In 1935, Larry and Ethel had enjoyed two months at St. Donat’s Castle in Wales, with Hearst and Marion having provided enough funds to insure a long, successful stay. Larry and Ethel were the bearers, in fact, of the sad news that summer to Alice Head in London about Pepi Lederer’s suicide in June.

The Jewish question remained at the forefront in the summer of 1939. Willicombe to Cobbie and to E. F. Tompkins, an editorial writer, both of them at the *New York Journal-American*; the date was July 21:

See INS [International News Service] despatch from London July twentieth British Parliament approves ban on Jewish immigration into Palestine. Chief instructs:

“Let us keep agitating for the African colonies. England is unwilling to give up the German colonies to the Jews. Let us see if the Belgian and Portuguese colonies cannot be had.”

Kindly give copy of this message to [Seymour] Berkson of INS for news coverage.

The movie industry continued to be of concern, fully two years now after Marion’s last picture. Ed Hatrick of Cosmopolitan Productions wired Bill Curley at Wynton on July 26; Curley was the editor of the *New York Journal-American*, Hearst’s flagship paper in the East, on which Bill Hearst, the Chief’s second son, held the post of publisher:

Dear Bill [Curley]: We have a good serial story on the next Cosmopolitan picture *Hotel For Women*, an original by Elsa Maxwell. It is now running in several of the papers including the *Los Angeles*

Herald [Express]. Your paper could start it about August tenth when the present serial finishes. Understand a copy of it was sent to you. Have you read it? Or to whom would you refer me in New York? Hope you are having a swell time. Kind regards.

Yes, it was the same Elsa Maxwell whom Hearst was so displeased with in 1938; she was now redeeming herself, one can only conclude.

A very big-minded figure of the twentieth century whom Hearst steadily admired and whom he usually saw eye to eye with was George Bernard Shaw, the great British playwright. Shaw, born in 1856, was seven years older than Hearst—at this stage a rarity since Hearst was almost always the grand old man in the society he kept, in large part because he ran with a crowd more his mistress's age and that of his sons. This message went to Willicombe from the Los Angeles office on July 26, 1939:

George Bernard Shaw interviewed by Thomas Watson on his 83rd birthday. Says in message to world "There will be no war." He adds that if he is wrong, and there is war, neither Hitler nor democracies will come out on top but at bottom of any trouble they start.

Shaw took those words right out of Hearst's mouth, or vice versa; it matters not who should get the credit, for as we all know, there very much *would* be a war.

The theme of taxes was back at the forefront on July 29, not through the pep-style editorialist Hearst but through his rival the *Los Angeles Times*—under a heading of "Actress Asks Cut in Levy on Home":

Hearing of the application of Marion Davies, motion-picture actress, for a reduction in the amount of the assessed valuation of her beach home as fixed for 1939–40 by the County Assessor's office, was set for 11 a.m. Monday [the 31st] before the Board of Supervisors sitting as a county board of equalization.

The home is at 415 Palisades Beach Road, Santa Monica. The Assessor has set a valuation of \$220,000 on the house and \$90,000 on the land. There is no protest to the land value, but Miss Davies asks that the one on the home be reduced to \$50,000.

The assessment on the house had been made at a fraction of its full value. But how large or how small a fraction? The question awaits probing, properly done in the context of Santa Monica beachfront real-estate values in 1939 (in turn converted to the dollars of the twenty-first century). A follow-up article in 1939 in the *Times* of August 1 was headed “Marion Davies Tax Assessment Stands”:

Marion Davies, motion-picture actress, must pay taxes on her beach home near Santa Monica on an assessed valuation of \$220,000 on the house and \$90,000 on the land on which it stands.

This was the ruling late yesterday of the Board of Supervisors, sitting as a County Board of Equalization, when the application of Miss Davies for a reduction in assessed valuation to \$50,000 on her home was heard. She made no protest to the valuation fixed by the County Assessor’s office on the land.

A film matter involving Darryl Zanuck and Fox cropped up on August 2, though not in the public press. Willicombe to Ella Williams, who was regularly addressed now as being at the “Cosmopolitan Corporation, 20th Century-Fox Studio, Beverly Hills”:

Returning Stanley-Livingstone [*Stanley and Livingstone*, with Spencer Tracy and Nancy Kelly] air express tonight. Will remind Chief about message on reaction after he sees it. He says:

“I often want to send congratulatory telegram but suppose Mr. Zanuck is fed up with that kind of thing. *The Rose of Washington Square* for instance was wonderful picture. Al Jolson and Alice Fay[e] were marvelous in it—in fact everybody was good.”

You may tell that to Mr. Zanuck.

Hearst himself wired Miss Williams the next day, August 3, on the same subject:

Stanley and Livingstone is a glorious picture with an inspiring and emotional theme. It is splendidly done. I wish Cosmo had it because it is such a fine tribute to a great journalist [Stanley].

That same day, Willicombe had the latest word for the *Los Angeles Examiner*, Elsa Maxwell having come out of the Mdivani scrape of the previous year in fine fettle:

Chief requests you have nice Cinema page made up for *Hotel for Women*, a Cosmopolitan Production.

On August 5, Willicombe had more to dispatch along these lines; first, he alerted the editors of all the Hearst evening papers as follows:

As requested, Chief would like you to give special attention in your motion picture columns to the Cosmopolitan film *Hotel for Women*. He recommends this particularly in your Saturday Cinema Flare, where he asks that you parade this film in big illustrations, with good text and typographical display.

And then he alerted the editors of all the Hearst morning papers, whose needs and standards differed somewhat from the evening papers:

Chief requests that morning and evening papers with Sunday editions—**BUT WHICH DO NOT RUN A COLOR CINEMA PAGE**—kindly have striking picture layouts in weekday issues on the moving picture *Hotel for Women*, (a Cosmopolitan Production).

Willicombe subsequently wired Ray Van Ettisch at the *Los Angeles Examiner*, who was Hearst's most-contacted editor of all, the *Examiner* serving all through the 1930s and 1940s as a home-base, clearing-house paper for Hearst more than any of the others—New York, Chicago, and San Francisco not excepted:

As you have had two-third[s] of Sunday Cinema color page for *Hotel for Women* on July twenty-third and whole page on *Stanley-Livingstone* July 30th, kindly disregard previous message regarding Cinema page in relation to these two pictures.

Instead, Chief would like the papers without Sunday Cinema color page to have striking layouts on *Hotel for Women*, a Cosmopolitan Production, in weekday issues; also some pictures and puffs for the *Stanley-Livingstone* film. I am notifying the papers.

A message from Hearst to Joe Connolly at King Features Syndicate, New York, went like this on Monday, August 7:

Have asked [Ed] Hatrick for full information concerning *Hotel for Women* and will contact [Louis] Sobol, [Maury] Paul and other writers to boost it.

This sort of intensive media blitz was probably typical of all the promotions run by the Hearst interests in behalf of some movie or other; the unique thing here in 1939 is that the coverage of these efforts is much more complete than nearly anywhere else.

HEARST HAD STRONG OPINIONS about art, a subject that for obvious reasons he professed to know well. Willicombe to all editors on August 8:

In connection with our campaign against modern so-called art, Chief calls your attention to reproductions in *Los Angeles Examiner* August seventh, and says:

“These are good examples of the hideous ugliness and absolute fraud of modern art. It preys on the ignorance and stupidity of pretended connoisseurs,—the unintelligentsia.”

Ray Van Ettisch at the *L.A. Examiner* knew Hearst and Willicombe well—knew when to alert them that Louella Parsons, for instance, might need some reining in; this to Willicombe on August 9:

I have held out of Louella’s column this paragraph on Norma Shearer. Please advise:

“In great excitement Norma Shearer telephoned Russell Birdwell from the liner *Paris* saying that she had received a cable from Noel Coward asking her to fly to London to see him about his new play. He

wants her to play opposite him and Norma is seriously considering accepting his offer. The only provision she makes is that he take the play to some small town and try it out until she is sure she will be acceptable to the London audiences. She will also discuss with Coward his *Tonight at 8:30* series [of short plays], which we told you a long time ago Metro [MGM] had bought for her.”

Willicombe got back to Ray Van Ettisch later the same day,

August 9:

Chief says thanks for cutting that [Parsons-Shearer] stuff out as it is nothing but press agent junk and even very poor junk. Also says she [Louella Parsons] has item on that young lady [Norma Shearer] in almost every day and is not improving her status by using paper to boost her friends and disparaging her enemies.

Be sure it is cut out of other papers.

Part of Van Ettisch’s job was to make sure the entire Hearst service, not just the six West Coast papers—two apiece in Los Angeles and San Francisco, plus one in Oakland and one in Seattle—got such orders and messages. Hearst and Willicombe didn’t have time to notify everyone in every instance.

Hearst was busy on August 10, for example, revising an editorial by Charlie Ryckman on modern art, one that Willicombe dispatched to all the papers, with special attention to Van Ettisch at the *L.A.*

Examiner:

It is a noteworthy fact that all children love to draw and paint, and that, as they learn to observe and better handle their tools, their drawings tend to acquire precision and objectivity, to correspond with natural shapes, forms and arrangements.

The so-called modern school of painting, however, proceeds in the opposite direction until we see adult and presumably skilful “artists” carefully cultivating infantilism. In other words, instead of cultivating maturity of thought and workmanship, they go back to the meaningless and fantastic scribbling of fumbling babies.

This is, of course, a deliberate fraud, persuaded by the mumbo-jumbo of certain dealers and critics.

People who are ignorant of true values in art are influenced to buy these phoney pictures, to invent and spread excuses, apologies and explanations for them.

Thus, the pretenders to culture, the dilettanti, the ignoranti, the unintelligentsia, create a market for the meaningless and utterly infantile product of frauds and fakers.

Not long ago, a Virginian writer who had never painted, decided to see whether he could fool the people who are thus fooling the people. He painted a deliberate daub and offered it for exhibition under the name of "Pavel Jordanovich, a little-known Russian master."

The daub was acclaimed, gravely commented upon, and "Jordanovich" pictures seemed in a fair way to establish a new vogue. There was nonplussed silence when "Jordanovich" identified himself as Paul Jordan Smith, a non-painting essayist who was merely having a little innocent fun.

In the same way, it is quite possible to present the hasty smears from a child's brush and mumble solemn critical nonsense about it.

But grownups who cunningly and deliberately paint, exhibit and actually sell the same trash, are simply obtaining money under false pretenses.

They should be prosecuted like anyone else who commits that offense.

Willicombe had one more thing for Van Ettisch before calling it a night on August 10:

Referring to story this morning, "Nudist Camps Debated by Police Board," Chief says:

"*Examiner* should join fight against nudist camps. They are festering sores of indecency."

Hearst heard from plenty of people who were down on their luck, whether because of the Depression or for any number of other reasons. One such person was E. Mason Hopper, a film director of yore who wired from Los Angeles on August 13:

Dear Mr. Hearst: Along the way which frankly has been a little unkind during the past year and a half the most hardening, encouraging and sustaining lift I have had was the recent word [that] you had inquired concerning my welfare and had remembered and spoken of our happy associations during *Janice Meredith* [1924] and *The Great White Way* [also 1924].

In the midst of your busy and important world I am grateful, sir, for the gracious thoughts you gave me. May I presume to ask for one additional moment of your time, so much of which has been given in making for the happiness of others? If the occasion should arise would you say a word in my behalf so that I can make a living in the film industry to which I have given more than twenty years of my life?

If so, sir, I shall be eternally grateful and shall fulfill the trust with all of my ability and sincerity always. Respectfully yours.

Babe Meigs, as Merrill C. Meigs of Chicago was known, was one who understandably tried to cash in a Hearst chip or two but failed, in this instance acting in some friends' behalf. He queried Willicombe on August 18:

Charles Glore and wife are in California. He is head of big financial house here. Close personal friend of mine and friendly to [Hearst] organization. They would like privilege of seeing Wyntoon and meeting Mister Hearst. Told him thought it was not practical but would contact you. Glore and wife delightful people and would not be boresome if Chief not available. Please wire.

Back came Willicombe's reply the same day:

Sorry, Babe, cannot arrange for your friends. Place will be full of people shortly for business conference, and after that Chief plans taking trip north; so that it is hardly possible to arrange for visitors.

In reality, the annals disclose no such trip on Hearst's part.

The next day, August 19, the mercurial Hearst had these words for Louella Parsons, care of the *L.A. Examiner*:

Leon Errol, the best comedian on stage or screen, does great job in *[The] Girl from Mexico*. Lupe Velez is equally good and the result is genuine spontaneous comedy in a most delightful picture. Please give them some good notices.

RKO Radio Pictures had released *The Girl from Mexico* on June 2, 1939. Miss Parsons had long been prominent on the radio as well, not just as a windbag gossip columnist. Hearst still owned four radio stations, despite the cutbacks and house-cleanings in 1937 and 1938. He had strong views on a certain aspect of the subject, akin to today's tug-of-war between bricks-and-mortar print media and the Internet. Joe Connolly at King Features and others in the East heard him expound on August 28:

I protest vigorously against allowing [William] Hillman and the other stars of our services and our newspapers [like Louella Parsons] to go on the radio.

What have the newspapers left to offer if the radio presents not only the news but the features and the contributors which the public buys the newspapers to read?

There has been nothing as great done in building up the radio and giving it competitive value over the newspapers as allowing the radio to exploit our stars as well as our news, and to get these to the public before we can issue.

I cannot understand upon what principle or policy or conception of journalism we allow this.

This program not only affects newspaper circulation and prestige, but newspaper advertising; because the radios can say that they have everything that the newspapers have and plus; and there is consequently no need of advertising in publications, but only in the radio.

The decline of advertising in all kinds of publications shows that this is not an empty fear.

And the decrease in income affects not only the income of owners but the ability of the publication to pay salaries.

It is well worth the close attention of all of us, therefore, and a complete reversal of policy should be adopted.

At present we not only give the radio all we have got, but we allow them to advertise it free in our columns.

It is an entirely new and most effective form of suicide.

The time was drawing near for the Hearst party to head to Chicago. Some of the New York executives would be meeting them there. Willicombe alerted Martin Huberth on Wednesday, August 30:

Chief arrives Chicago Sunday [September 3], Drake Hotel, suggests maybe you can arrive before Wednesday [the 6th], thinks you should. Best wishes.

By all indications, Huberth complied. And on Friday, September 1, while Hearst, Marion, and those with them were leaving Los Angeles, Hitler invaded Poland, setting off World War II.

IN LATE AUGUST 1939, Joe Willicombe compiled a lengthy memo about the Beach House in Santa Monica. He filed it away for future reference, much as he did dozens of other memos that his widow, the remarried Jean Willicombe Bissantz, would allow the biographer John F. Dunlap to copy in the 1960s, thus adding to the wealth of primary material on which Dunlap based his book, *The Hearst Saga: The Way It Really Was*, and to which all other Hearst researchers are deeply indebted. The mice were safely playing in Santa Monica while the cats were away at Wyntoon, as Ella Williams alerted Willicombe on Monday, August 28:

Marion told Ethel [Davies] to go down to Beach House. She was joined by Rose [Davies] and Charlie [Lederer] and Arthur and Pat [Mr. & Mrs. Lake] and that terrible friend of Arthur's [possibly Chuck Shuey].

They brought their own food and drink,—also the cook from [1700] Lexington Road [Beverly Hills]. Miss Rose's chauffeur acted as butler. So there is no expense, excepting laundry— they used 21 bath towels

yesterday— they are back again to-day and some of them were overheard stating they would be there 3 or 4 weeks.

The serious part is that someone burned a hole as big as half a dollar in one of the newly covered chairs, also a hole in the hall rug (as if someone put out cigarette), stained table with glasses, broke one good glass, made quite a nick in table as if with a knife.

They have been using breakfast room— not large dining room. On the telephone was [a] notice that it was to be used only for business and not personal calls (intended for help primarily). Pat saw it and said “To hell with Willicombe (whose name was on the notice) what right has he got to tell us what numbers to put down.” (The notice asked that numbers called be put down, to be able to check bills.)

Also Pat raised the shades in the room where we had the rugs rolled up in moth-proofing and shades pulled down to keep out the sun. And that terrible friend of Arthur’s god-damned the maid for being slow in opening the gate.

I would be better pleased if someone else took over the supervision of the Beach House.

Willicombe replied to Ella Williams with a memo of his own, containing telephoned orders that quoted Hearst as saying:

“The Beach House belongs to Miss Davies but is leased by me at \$2500 a month.

“And I have full authority over the house and responsibility for it; and I pay for all the servants, and all the watchmen, and all the cost of running it and taking care of it; and I am not going to allow anybody in it.

“Make this clear to everyone, and if necessary get Larry Mitchell to get out an injunction.

“If Marion wants to take the house back I will cancel the lease of course; but I do not think she does.

“And while I have the lease, the house must be run as I say.”

The memo is another one of those archival items to which we can only say . . . *wow!* None of us rank-and-file people knew of such arrangements; W. A. Swanberg and David Nasaw and all the rest of us

who've prodded this side of Hearst and Marion's private life simply never had a clue. It does raise the question which lease Hearst was on in 1939. The same one as back in 1935, merely renewed or rolled over? Or an entirely new arrangement? About all we can say is, thank God for dear old Jean Bissantz and for John Dunlap, both of whom died in the early 2000s. We may never have run across such an in-depth, realistic account by any other means.

HEARST HAD TO LAY DOWN the law in other matters about this same time. For anyone heading up to Wynton from Los Angeles—movie personality, newspaperman, family friend, it mattered not whom—there had to be guidelines. Hence this from Willicombe to his office staff in Los Angeles, September 19, 1939:

Chief's instructions are, without exception, that we will take care of fare and reservations for any invited guest coming through by railroad from Los Angeles. Anyone else will have to take care of and pay for own reservations and tickets. Am sending this same message to Miss [Ella] Williams. Wire me what time anyone will arrive, if morning at Mt. Shasta [City], if evening at Dunsmuir.

Not quite a week later, the *Los Angeles Examiner* editorialized about the industry that Hearst and Marion had left behind for the summer and fall but that they were keeping a close eye on; Hearst's approval was sought by the *Los Angeles Examiner* on September 23:

There is an old and timely adage that boats should not be rocked in stormy seas.

The motion picture industry is encountering heavy seas. The war in Europe has drastically reduced its foreign market. An immediate result has been the necessity of curtailing production costs.

Spokesmen for studio employees are demanding unreasonable pay increases under threat of an immediate nationwide strike if their demands are not granted.

That is rocking the boat. To grant the demand, producers declare, would mean laying off many workers, for it is impossible to increase payroll costs at this time. Moreover, the industry has always paid higher wages than most other lines of work, and still does.

Now is the time for motion picture employees to sit down and discuss the situation calmly and constructively and TRY TO HELP THE PRODUCERS STAY IN BUSINESS instead of trying to put them out of business.

This is not merely for the benefit of the producers, but FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE EMPLOYEES AND THE COUNTRY GENERALLY.

A strike would not have and would not deserve public approval. Aside from the fact that it would deprive millions of Americans of their best and certainly their least expensive form of entertainment, it would come with especially bad grace when the world is in misery and the industry [is] least able to do anything about it.

Employees who have jobs at good pay should consider themselves fortunate and the last thing they should do is cause fellow workers to lose their jobs just to get more money for themselves.

Certainly the unions involved in the pay increase demands can see the wisdom of taking stock of conditions in friendly and honest conference with the employers. Unions that pride themselves on operating the American way should realize that is the American way.

Most Americans dislike anything that has the appearance of taking advantage of misfortune. And that is what the public would think the unions were doing in their inopportune demands for wage increases that could come only at the expense of jobs to other workers.

This is certainly not the time to create disorder in an industry that has always stood so notably for order, which has given the world so much happiness for its money and which has already taken smilingly severe reverses through no fault of its own.

The editorial is a better than average example of the craft. It had to have been written by Hearst or, if not by him, by Jose Rodriguez, a man second only to Charlie Ryckman on the West Coast in having mastered the Hearst "pep" style that traced back to Lord Beaverbrook and the English tabloids of the early and mid-1930s, observed

firsthand by Hearst when he was abroad, especially in the years 1928, 1930, 1931, and 1934.

Warden Woolard, Ray Van Ettisch's relief editor at the *Examiner*, queried Willicombe on September 28 about a timely matter that he knew would be of great interest to Hearst:

We have been asked by Loew's State Theater [Los Angeles] to have an editorial commenting on the fiftieth anniversary of the start of moving photographic pictures by Edison. The golden jubilee is next week. Also next week is the world premiere of Twentieth Century-Fox's picture *Hollywood Cavalcade*. This, of course, is the theater's interest.

Would you kindly let me know whether Mr. Hearst cares to have [Jose] Rodriguez prepare an editorial on the industry's anniversary and whether *Hollywood Cavalcade* should be mentioned.

What Woolard meant is that the fall of 1889 had witnessed the construction of the "photographic building" at the Edison laboratory in New Jersey.

With the war entering its second month overseas, new things were happening stateside. Willicombe to Bill Wren, editor of the *San Francisco Examiner*, on October 3:

Chief requests that all the California papers cooperate in formation of a "National Legion of the Mothers of America," along the lines proposed to *L-A Examiner* by Mary Ireland in a letter and prospectus, copies of which are being mailed to you tonight.

The object of the Legion is to keep the United States and the boys of the United States out of foreign wars.

Chief suggests that if developed by our papers successfully here in California, it can be extended to other sections of the country and become an organization of tremendous national importance.

Hearst himself heard from Mary Ireland of the Mothers group in Los Angeles on October 6:

I returned from San Diego late today [Thursday, October 5] to learn incredible good news [of] your favorable response to my open letter requesting aid in organizing National Legion [of] Women of America.

Signatures of twenty thousand Los Angeles women have been obtained and await only requisite incorporation and assignment to precinct and district units.

Will you authorize full page advertisement Sunday edition necessary to accomplish this basic first step of what may be historic enterprise? Will submit copy articles of incorporation also organization layout to Mr. [Warden] Woolard or Mr. [James] Richardson [both of the *Los Angeles Examiner*] tomorrow Friday.

[S.S.] *Iroquois* incident [of October 4] one more proof there is no time to lose. With your help we still have chance to aid Senate defenders of embargo. Confidently yours.

The *Iroquois* was a U.S. passenger liner that the Germans had threatened to sink, sparking an international furor. All was not grim and serious, though, at this point in the fall of 1939. On the same day that Hearst heard from Mary Ireland, October 6, he heard from Jimmie Manos at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles:

Winter season at Cocanut Grove opens with exciting triple bill welcoming back Morton Downey, Russell Swann and introducing for the first time on coast Enric Madriguera with his great rhythm tango and rhumba band this Tuesday, October tenth. Please phone or wire your reservation as I am trying to hold good table for you.

Back to more serious matters. On October 13, Warden Woolard inquired of Hearst on behalf of the *Los Angeles Examiner*:

I do not wish to send out the following information from the Mothers of America until the Chief passes on it. If it is okeh please let me or Mr. [James J.] Packman know.

The National Legion of the Mothers of America have authorized us to ask you to select in your city one or more women who will take charge temporarily of the registration of members. The founders of the Mothers of America ask that this woman be not only of good standing

but also unidentified with political or partisan activities that would arouse criticism. They are anxious to keep out of the organization professional promoters, solicitors and commercial tie-ups.

The Mothers of America hope some printed literature describing the plan of organization will be ready for distribution in a few days. Meanwhile the registrars can enroll names of members. The three founders [Mary Ireland, Mary M. Sheldon, and Frances Sherrill], all of whom were unknown to us until they started the movement to arouse the mothers of the country against war, have provided their own headquarters at No. 1577, Cross Roads of the World, 6671 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles.

They would like to know the names and addresses of any women who may be selected to carry on registration in your city.

A letter containing additional information concerning the purpose of the organization, and also clippings of the material published in the Los Angeles Examiner, went airmail to you Saturday [October 7].

H. O. Hunter was at the helm to receive Woolard's query, Joe Willicombe and his lady love, the young Jean Henry, having gone to Reno to get married (their age difference was about the same as Hearst and Marion's). Hunter, disliking his first name of Horace, went by "Bill" among his friends. He replied to Woolard later on October 13:

Chief says "okay" on your message to the editors on National Legion of Mothers of America.

On Saturday the 14th, Bill Hunter had more to tell Woolard in Los Angeles:

Chief looked over the general organization outline of the National Legion of the Mothers of America and said: "It all seems extremely good and entirely unobjectionable to me." He also asked if you solicited any criticisms of it.

Another Willicombe memo, this one on file in the Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library, is dated October 20 (a Tuesday) and partly concerns the Beach House:

NICK YOST, who brought up the [Venus] statue from San Simeon [which arrived at Wyntoon on Monday, October 19], is the best man to handle the unloading and unpacking of the Hispanos at San Simeon.

MR. [W. R.] WILLIAMS HAS ASKED THAT HE GET BACK THERE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

Also the truck he has will be needed for this work.

Hearst made notations on the memo for Willicombe to work from; he scrawled a quick “OK” next to this first part of the typewritten text. The “Hispanos” were the superb collection of Hispano-Moresque pottery that Hearst had spent decades assembling and that he’d snatched away from those lieutenants of his in New York who were bent on selling the pottery—all part of the ownership tug-of-war between W. R. Hearst Personal and non-personal entities such as American Newspapers, Inc.

Willicombe’s memo of October 20 continued:

WE HAD PLANNED TO SEND HIM [NICK YOST] DIRECTLY TO LOS ANGELES WITH THE FURNITURE FOR THE BEACH HOUSE—ALSO HE IS EXPERT AT CRATING THE FURNITURE.

“That can be done later,” scrawled Hearst.

“Will it be OK to delay shipment to Beach House until end of week,” Willicombe further asked, “and let Yost go down to San Simeon with truck? HE MUST BE THERE BY MONDAY [THE 16th] FOR THE HISPANO OPERATION.”

Between the lines, Willicombe indicated why the furniture was being shipped to the Beach House in the first place:

Of course the things will not be required at [the] Beach House until the things there have been packed and shipped [for transit to New York, there to be dispersed].

Willicombe finished with another all-caps sentence, seemingly an incomplete one, something rarely seen in his writings:

SO THAT [THEREFORE] IT MIGHT BE BETTER TO HAVE YOST RETURN [TO SAN SIMEON] AND PACK AND SHIP THE FURNITURE TO BEACH HOUSE ON TRUCK, AVOIDING RISK OF BREAKAGE IN LOADING, UNLOADING, AND RELOADING,—IF HE STOPPED AT SAN SIMEON ON WAY TO BEACH HOUSE.

Hearst made no comment on this second half of the memo, from the paragraph containing “Will it be OK to delay shipment” right on through the incomplete sentence.

An item from not quite two years later in the Hearst Papers at The Bancroft throws a good deal of light on this Beach House matter—on this arrangement whereby Hearst would restock rooms in Santa Monica as much as needed, following the removal from there of eighteenth-century English and Early American items that were earmarked for public auctions or private dispersals. C. C. Rounds of the Bronx warehouse wrote to Willicombe on June 2, 1941, “to clarify the situation in connection with the nine pieces of American furniture at the Beach House, which Chief had previously agreed to ship [to Rounds in New York] providing suitable substitutions could be made”:

Approximately 100 pieces of American furniture located at the Beach House were included in Schedule “A,” with a value of approximately \$43,000. When Mr. [Geoffrey] Konta was in California in the summer of 1939 Mr. Hearst and he went through the House and Mr. Hearst selected the nine pieces which could be shipped providing he could get something [owned by W. R. Hearst Personal] to replace them. These nine pieces were valued at \$12,620.

Geoff Konta was at San Simeon from the middle of June 1939 until Hearst and Marion left there for a quick stop in Santa Monica before doubling back northward to Wynton in early July, where, as we’ve been seeing, they would spend the rest of the year, with some minor exceptions.

THE NEWLY REMARRIED Joe Willicombe was back from Reno in time to field another of Warden Woolard's queries from Los Angeles, this one dated October 23, 1939:

Mr. [Richard] Carrington [publisher of the *Examiner*, for whom Bill Hunter was his regular secretary] directs me to refer to Chief a paragraph in Louella's column for the morning relating to Jimmy Roosevelt. We are holding out of early edition pending decision by Mr. Hearst. Mr. Carrington recommended caution in dealing with Jimmy's marital troubles because he is the President's son. Hedda Hopper had an exclusive interview in late Sunday [*Los Angeles Times*] in which Jimmy declined to deny he was separated. Louella says she had been given promise of [Samuel] Goldwyn and others that she would be first to get any news of the separation.

The questioned paragraph reads:

"Now that James Roosevelt, insurance-selling son of F. D. R. and more recently a part of our movie industry, no longer denies the rift in his domestic lute we see no reason why we should keep the promise we made to him to say nothing. Mr. R[oosevelt] has had his nurse, Romelle Schneider, by his side ever since he came here from the Mayo Hospital. Her brother was the mate on his yacht all summer, until school started; her sister is his secretary and her mother frequently cooks dinner for him. All of this we knew—also that his wife preferred to live in the east, while Miss Schneider loves Hollywood. Every one of us who met Mrs. Jimmie, the daughter of Dr. Harvey Cushing, famed surgeon who died only last week, liked her, but she never gave herself a chance to like us—she came here too seldom. It doesn't take a fortune teller to know that Mr. R.'s future domestic plans are made and were finally settled when he went east to his father-in-law's funeral."

Hearst took swift action, as Willicombe told those awaiting word in Los Angeles:

Jimmy Roosevelt killed out of Parsons column to all papers.

The Beach House may have stood empty on or about Hearst's birthday of April 29 in a year like 1939, yet the Hearst-Davies

entourage still knew how to have fun. They'd thrown a memorable Halloween party at Wyntoon in 1937 and were gearing up for another one two years later. Willicombe to Prudence Penny at the *Los Angeles Examiner* on October 24:

Dear Prudence Penny:

Would you mind sending me a few suggestions for decorations—table and otherwise—for Chief's Halloween dinner.

He has suggested that there might be something new, and I am having someone do a little shopping.

But it occurred to me that you might have some original ideas that could be adapted to the occasion and which of course would be better than any of the Halloween stock stuff obtainable in the stores.

I am sending this over the INS printer to save time,—and for the same reason, would you mind sending your reply down to Mr. [Bill] Wootten who will shoot it back to me over the printer.

Prudence Penny sent some detailed "Halloween suggestions" later on October 24. They included a recipe for a steaming hot punch that she told Willicombe was "exceptionally good." On October 25, he received nearly as many details from Marion McEniry, Prudence Penny's counterpart at the *San Francisco Examiner*.

Halloween came and went. On November 6, Willicombe heard from Bill Curley, the editor of the main Hearst paper in New York, the *Journal-American* (the not-so-main paper these days was the *Daily Mirror* tabloid):

Any truth in rumor given me that Benjamin Gaylor[d] Hauser will be married to Greta Garbo at San Simeon ranch during Christmas holidays?

No, no truth at all—not unless Hayes Perkins was telling the story or Henry Luce's *Time* magazine was doing so. Willicombe got back to Curley promptly that day:

Not the slightest truth in Garbo rumor. Regards.

With Hearst being the lessee of the Beach House, he had to wrangle with New York over what items inside it should be liquidated, a process that had been under way since the summer of 1937 with regard to San Simeon, Wynton, and various warehouses and even certain museums holding Hearst items. Geoff Konta of the legal firm of Konta, Kirchwey & Engel in New York had charge of the jockeying and juggling. Willicombe to Konta on November 7, 1939:

Chief tonight instructed me to notify Bill Williams [Ella Williams] not to ship east the three-part mahogany table from Beach House Breakfast Room, being item number twenty-eight on your list. Have written her to that effect, sending you copy of letter.

Hayes Perkins would have hit the roof over what happened next, toothless teetotaler that he was. It was November 13, and Hearst wired Bellows & Company on Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood:

If wine ordered [for] account [of] Hotel Warwick New York for delivery to me at San Simeon has not been shipped kindly hold for instructions and telegraph me collect, McCloud, California.

Bellows & Company got back to Hearst on November 14 with the following:

Retel [re telegram]. Portion order already shipped. Balance arriving from New York about twentieth. Please wire instructions on it.

Hearst told Bellows & Company that same day, November 14:

Kindly deliver balance of order for me to 415 Ocean Front Santa Monica, in care of William Newton, and telegraph me when so delivered.

Willicombe, in turn, apprised Bill Newton of what was going on:

Chief has ordered number cases wine delivered at Beach House in your care. Please telegraph number of cases delivered and then write letter indicating from outside of cases the contents of each. Do not open. Ask [H. O.] Hunter come down and store in vault.

Well, at least we know for sure now that there was a vault at the Beach House, maybe more than one. San Simeon has several, as is well known.

JULIA MORGAN'S WORK on 910 Benedict Cañon Drive had ended in late October, allowing the ledger sheets on that job to be marked "Closed." A month later, on November 20, Willicombe wired Ella Williams at the Cosmopolitan Corporation, care of Twentieth Century-Fox:

Chief says he thinks the statue should face the living room as there are more windows for it to be seen from.

It's a bit of a needle-in-a-haystack matter to determine which setting Hearst meant. But he almost certainly meant 910 Benedict Cañon. Over on the Fox lot, a couple of miles away, the Bungalow sat in storage, propped up on wooden blocks. When Frank Hellenthal or Mac McClure or Morgan needed window frames or doorways or anything else from the multi-room ensemble, they carried them away from Fox and took them to the jobsite, just around the corner on one side from the Beverly Hills Hotel and on the other side from 1700 Lexington Road, where Hearst and Marion had got their start with local building projects in the mid-1920s.

In a departure from the all-Wyntoon diet that the party had been on that fall, a quick trip to San Francisco materialized. Willicombe to his Los Angeles office on Saturday, November 25, the weekend before Thanksgiving:

We are going San Francisco tonight. Returning Wednesday night [the 29th]. Will be at Fairmont Hotel, and kindly see that [news]papers are sent up for delivery to Chief there. Thanks.

Willicombe alerted Bill Wootten, the International News Service telegrapher in Los Angeles, with more specific details:

We are going to San Francisco tonight returning to Wynton Wednesday night.

You can reach me at Fairmont Hotel through *Examiner* or INS in SF Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday up to eight-thirty Wednesday night.

He also got in touch with Bill Wren, editor of the *San Francisco Examiner*; this was likewise on November 25:

Have just wired [Clarence] Lindner [publisher of the *Examiner*] get two additional nice rooms and baths at Fairmont for people added to party; also to have additional car at Sixteenth Street [Station] Oakland to meet us, making four cars and paper [delivery] truck for baggage.

Will you please make sure he got message and [that] these additional arrangements are made and oblige.

The party got back to Wynton on Wednesday night, as planned, in time for Thanksgiving dinner the next day, November 30.

HEARST WAS A GREAT ADMIRER of David Lloyd George, who was his same age (b. 1863), though not as admiring of him as he was of Bernard Shaw. On December 3, the Sunday after Thanksgiving in that era (before the date got changed by FDR to the fourth Thursday in November rather than the last Thursday), Hearst wired Bill Curley and Cobbie at the *New York Journal-American*:

Please do not print any more Lloyd George articles without my okay.

We stopped him previously because he was feeding us Communism.

He is beginning again.

His apologies for Stalin and Communism this morning are ridiculous.

Perhaps we should give notice of termination of contract.

Be sure to forward his articles in time [for me to see them] and if not obtainable early do not accept them.

Willicombe had an unrelated message for Martin Huberth in New York that same day, December 3:

Louella Parsons is making personal appearances around the country as you probably know and presume she will be in New York soon. How about her and her troupe staying at our [Warwick] hotel? Thought you might like to get after her.

Yes, why not; business was business. People's lives were very much Hearst's business, no question about it. The next day, December 4, Hearst wired Abe Merritt, the mad-scientist man of letters behind *The American Weekly*, a big money-maker for the Hearst service and often a scurrilous one at that:

How about Mdivani-Murray [child custody] story and Bill Hart and other Hollywood stories?

I think we can get first class cinema stories of *American Weekly* character every week, and I believe if we could we would get strong line of cinema advertising, what think?

He was referring to Koran Mdivani (b. 1927), the fought-over son of David Mdivani of the Hearst-Davies circle and Mae Murray, a girlish cougar nearly twenty years Mdivani's senior (neither had since remarried). Bill Hart, of course, was better known to his many fans as William S. Hart, the silent-screen cowboy.

On the civic front in Los Angeles, Hearst had long been an advocate of municipal ownership, contrary to the views of Henry Huntington or Harrison Gray Otis of the *Times*. The mayoralty of New York City had been stolen from Hearst in 1905 when he ran on that semi-socialist plank. The *Examiner's* Warden Woolard, knowing Hearst well that way, made sure that Willicombe was kept informed; this on Thursday, December 7:

On next Tuesday's ballot is Proposition No. 1 which would establish a municipally owned and operated bus system. It calls for the issuance of ten million dollars in bonds to finance establishment of the system and

operation of a commission of three members to be paid five thousand annually each. They are to hold office for four years after which commissioners would be appointed by the mayor.

Supporters of the proposition say the bonds would be strictly revenue bonds and the issue would be self-liquidating. They insist board must be named in the proposition to insure that friends of municipal ownership are enabled to launch the project.

Mayor [Fletcher] Bowron has the leadership in opposition. He does not hold any brief [support] for the Los Angeles Railway Company, but he says this is NOT municipal ownership. He argues it would put ten million dollars at the mercy of three men over whom the city government would have no control. He also doubts the wisdom of paralleling the existing line which might serve to congest rather than relieve traffic. The Chamber of Commerce is among the big organizations here opposing the measure.

Willicombe got into the matter deeper when he wired Woolard at the *Examiner* that same day, December 7:

Chief has received following telegram signed Mrs. Sarah McBride and Will H. Anderson, neither of whom he knows, dated Los Angeles, Dec. 7 and instructs me to ask you about it:

“A dangerous and destructive proposal disguised as a municipal measure is on the ballot of the special election to be held in Los Angeles next Tuesday at a cost to the taxpayers of more than \$100,000. It is known as Proposition #1, and grants autocratic powers and unlimited financial resources of the city to three self-selected and self-qualified political promoters who designate themselves under the proposed ordinance as the Transportation Commissioners for a term of four years.

“We appeal to you as the outstanding friend and supporter for more than half a century of every true progressive and helpful reform in America, to expose this vicious, undemocratic, and politically dishonest attempt to raid the public treasury. The mayor, city council, and practically every legitimate and liberal organization in Los Angeles are opposed to Proposition #1 because it will raise taxes, plunge the city into debt, and hinder development of transportation systems now

undergoing modernization without benefiting anyone except the promoters.

“Your Los Angeles publishers and editors have the necessary material to expose to the people the true character of this proposal. Throughout your long and distinguished public career you have always placed measures and principles above individuals. Can we not expect your help now when it is so urgently needed?”

For any who question that Hearst’s *Examiner* stood head and shoulders above the *Times* throughout the 1930s, they need merely read this next message, which Dick Carrington, publisher of the *Examiner*, proudly sent to Willicombe on December 9:

Here is a pre-Christmas Christmas present. Tomorrow Sunday the *Los Angeles Examiner* will publish one hundred and eighteen thousand five hundred [118,500] lines of retail display advertising. This is the greatest volume of retail advertising ever published by the *Examiner* in a single issue daily or Sunday and according to all available r[e]cords represents the greatest volume of retail advertising ever published in a single issue by any Los Angeles newspaper daily or Sunday. Kind regards.

Kind regards indeed. What came next wasn’t quite as kind, though; but again, business was business, as Hearst knew all too well. Willicombe to Joe Connolly at King Features Syndicate, New York, on December 12:

Referring to New York despatch printed here dated December seventh, in which Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt is quoted as saying [John] Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* is accurate and contribution to our national knowledge in an address at People’s Institute [New York],— Chief instructs to ask you if we can get an article from Mrs. Roosevelt on the migrants to California and the book *Grapes of Wrath*.

He says we want a careful article for the March [of] Events section [in all the Hearst newspapers] and will pay for it of course.

Connolly wired back on Wednesday, December 13, that he would “have decision on Mrs. Roosevelt’s idea Friday.” He added for

Willicombe, "I think her agent will want more details on what is wanted."

Hearst himself wired Connolly the same day, December 13:

Mrs. Roosevelt spoke at women's luncheon about California migrants. She said book *Grapes of Wrath* was right. The papers did not have very good account.

I would like her to elaborate her speech in article. If she does not however want to write article, will she give us careful transcript of her speech?

We are very interested in migrant problem and want to see them made good citizens of California and believe they can be if we do not have too many.

A short message from Ella Williams came in on December 14, addressed to Willicombe:

Have not received sketches for lighting fixtures submitted to folks. Very important that we have them.

These words most likely alluded to the modest house (often miscalled a mansion in Hollywood lore) at 910 Benedict Cañon Drive in Beverly Hills; portions of the Cosmopolitan Bungalow were being reused there through Julia Morgan and Mac McClure, with Frank Hellenthal doing his usual contractor turn.

More had to be said about how guests should come and go at Wyntoon, what with the Christmas holiday on the near horizon. Willicombe to Carlie Layne of his Los Angeles office on December 15:

Anyone Miss Williams requests for remainder of year okey on reservations, any way they want them, excepting if they come by plane to San Francisco they pay plane fare and reservation as heretofore, but check with me on them to be sure. All railroad trips are okey without checking. But wire me when and how they are coming and arrival time and where.

That was Ella Williams, of course, or Bill Williams, the woman who'd asked about the light fixtures. Miss Williams wired Willicombe the next day, December 16:

Those flying Wednesday morning [the 20th] Harry Crocker, Louise Stanley, Mary Cassiday and Matt Moore. [The Jimmy] Swinnertons did not want to fly so are leaving on *West Coast [Limited]* Tuesday. Things sent up last night should arrive Dunsmuir tonight six o'clock from Robinsons, Magnins, Bullocks Wilshire and May [Co.] Wilshire stores. These are sent up on approval [as prospective Christmas gifts] for folks to look over. Stores would appreciate their return as soon as possible.

Stripped of his epaulets—or was he?—Hearst, and Marion too, we're living fairly high off the hog again, as they probably had been all along, all along, all along, scarcely missing a beat. By this late part of 1939, the misery of 1937 and especially of 1938 were well in the past. Don't tell any of the Hearst biographers, though, who were hurriedly racing to the end of Hearst's impossibly long, over-eventful life.

December 16 offered a good one on Louella Parsons, the columnist who, according to sacred Hollywood texts, had been awarded a life contract for keeping quiet about Thomas Ince's strange death in 1924, the episode called "William Randolph's Hearse" around town, at least according to Kenneth Angier's ribald book *Hollywood Babylon*. Joe Connolly of King Features wired Hearst with a type of message seen every two or three years in The Bancroft annals:

Louella Parsons contract expires on December 31, 1939.

We wish to offer a new contract for a period of two years beginning January first 1940 for her exclusive services, for which she will be paid \$500 per week plus \$100 per week expenses and \$35 per week for a secretary.

She is in New York and I propose to see her.

One clause of her contract provides that she will have to obtain our consent to make personall [*sic*] appearances on stage, radio broadcasts

and motion pictures and that we shall receive one-third of the monies paid to her.

I believe there will be no trouble about her contract except with regard to latter clause and therefore ask your wishes with regard to it.

Good money in 1939, yes. But was it enough to keep her quiet, as brazenly noisy and tasteless as she could be? Hardly. The upshot, of course, is that Miss Parsons was never on the *Oneida* in the first place in November 1924, the date of Tom Ince's death, even though some old Hollywoodians like to swear she was.

While Hearst and Connolly were mulling over Louella's new contract, Bill Wootten, the INS telegrapher in Los Angeles got word to Willicombe; the date was still December 16:

Is it OK to send out following item in Louella Parsons column for Tuesday:

"I was so delighted to run into Ambassador Joseph Kennedy and his pretty wife between acts of *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. I had a nice talk with him and he is just as affable and scintillating as he was when he used to be one of our best known film producers. He told me that he and Mrs. Kennedy are on their way to Florida to spend Christmas and that he is very happy to be home again although he thinks England is a great country. I was happy to be able to give him first hand news on my boss, William Randolph Hearst, for whom he asked [lined out: and for whom he expressed admiration]. I told him I had just talked over the long distance telephone with Mr. Hearst and that he was well and happy."

Before Willicombe could reply, Hearst was on the transom to Joe Connolly in New York; it was now Monday, December 18:

I think we should keep Louella. She is so far superior to all others. She is surely worth contract offered her.

There seems to be no message from Willicombe to Bill Wootten regarding the latter's question of December 16. Nonetheless, Wootten had another Parsons matter to air with the Colonel on December 19:

Louella Parsons lead for Sunday Dec. 24 is interview with Mayor [Fiorello] LaGuardia on plan to build motion picture studios and make pictures in New York.

In one place he says “Good pictures have been made in New York. William Randolph Hearst made plenty of good ones at the Cosmopolitan Studios; and climate didn’t bother him.”

No, and the lousy weather didn’t bother lots of other filmmakers, either—such as those in England, France, Germany, even New Jersey, and still other places where the sun didn’t shine three hundred or more days a year. The whole climatic theory of the film industry having established itself in Hollywood (to use the term to mean greater Los Angeles) is questionable in the extreme. Just ask the urban geographer Allen J. Scott of UCLA, an Englishman who wrote *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry*. Balderdash, says Scott.

Hearst queried Dick Berlin at Hearst Magazines in New York the same day, December 19, with the latest on Eleanor Roosevelt and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Mrs. Roosevelt willing to write on *Grapes of Wrath* and migrants for *Cosmopolitan*. I think this would be important article.

Furthermore, you could follow it with some notable writer like Gertrude Atherton or maybe Elsie Robinson or Kathleen Norris, who would take somewhat different view of California attitude.

I believe this would make valuable pair of articles.

Willicombe had word for Bill Wootten at INS in Los Angeles, regarding the second Parsons matter Wootten had raised earlier that day, Tuesday, December 19:

The quotation from Louella Parson’s [sic] Sunday lead mentioning Chief’s name is OK.

The war in Europe was becoming the major issue of the day, for perfectly good reason. Hearst received a long telegram on December 19

from a group of which Ronald Colman, Charles Boyer, and two others were members:

Dear Mr. Hearst: Committee of Four, Ronald Colman chairman Organization Committee, Alan Mowbray, president British War Relief Assn. of Southern California, Charles Boyer, French War Relief Inc., F. Stuart Roussel, chairman Organization and Entertainment Committee French War Relief, Inc. arranging great Franco-British War Relief Dinner Dance for Wednesday evening January seventeenth in the Ambassador Hotel's Cocomanut Grove at which some of America's greatest stars will entertain.

Complete committees not formed but assurance[s] of cooperation already come from Claudett[e] Colbert, Madeleine Carroll, Pat Patterson, Herbert Marshall, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Edgar Bergen, Adolph[e] Menjou, Basil Rathbone, Sir Cedric Hardwick, Mary Pickford, Norma Shearer, C. Aubrey Smith, Dame May Whitley, Robert Montgomery, Brian Aherne, Nigel Bruce, Jeannette McDonald, and other names to follow.

George Fusenot president of French War Relief Inc. and the above would appreciate that cooperation from the press which you have always accorded such charitable movements.

Here's one reason (among many others) that Hearst wasn't hurting quite as badly as his biographers have told us; Irving Engel of the legal firm Konta, Kirchwey & Engel, New York, to Willicombe on December 21:

Data just received on Campeche [Mexico] operations indicates possibility of \$29,000 increase in Chief's taxable income. Suggest additional donation of \$5,000 making total for year \$20,000 to be on safe side in event of disallowance antique [capital] losses.

There was no rest for the wicked. On December 25, known to the remainder of the world as Christmas Day, Bill Wootten at INS had another matter to air with Willicombe:

[Twentieth Century-Fox] Studio asking for out-of-town publicity for *Grapes of Wrath*. Harry Friedman's story, passed by [Warden] Woolard

and printed in Sunday's *[Los Angeles] Examiner* was sent to San Francisco, Detroit and Chicago Sunday papers but not to other Hearst Sunday papers, which stopped this special service several months ago.

Dick Berlin, meanwhile, was incredulous. My God, didn't Hearst know he'd been crudely lampooned by John Steinbeck? He wired the Chief from Hearst Magazines in New York on December 26:

We feel that an article by Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt on *Grapes of Wrath* even though presented with a rebuttal would only tend to increase the sale of this sordid obscene book. We cannot feel you would wish your *Cosmopolitan* [magazine] to run even a remote chance of promoting [John] Steinbeck's social misstatements and wacky underdog philosophies. Aside from his nasty veiled references to you personally do we want to give any sort of assist to this dirty stuff?

Maybe it would all get lost in the shuffle or whatever the image ought to have been when profanity was the issue. Hearst seemed to keep thinking that if he perched high enough on a mountain or disappeared deeply enough into a forest that it would all go away on its own. Joe Willicombe had told Tom White on Christmas Day:

Chief decided today to close up at Wyntoon before the first of the year. He says you better go to Los Angeles where he will look forward to seeing you.

That would be at the Beach House, of course. Willicombe gave Bill Hunter, his second in command, the details on Wednesday, December 27:

Chief and all of party leaving here 11:45 tonight, arriving Los Angeles 7:35 Thursday night [the 28th]. There is possibility that I will not go down on train with them on account of things to be done here. Will you kindly get any editorials or messages from Miss [Carlie] Layne and Bill Wootten that come in during Thursday and meet train at 7:35 and give them to Chief if I am not with him.

Also will you kindly take care of the job Friday [the 29th] and in fact until I get back, which should be day or two after Chief—Monday [January 1] at latest.

Willicombe didn't wish Hunter a "Happy New Year" for 1940. He did say thanks, though, as anyone as busy as he was would surely have done. Actually, the Hearst party stopped briefly at San Simeon on the way south, despite what Willicombe told Hunter. As Alice Head had recounted in her memoir, one always had to be ready for last-minute changes with Hearst. To fail at that could cost a person his job, as it did Williams at San Simeon—W. R. Williams, that is, the warehouse manager who'd taken over the hilltop household operation in 1937. When the Hearst party dropped in at San Simeon on December 28, 1939, possibly on short notice or perhaps even on none at all, Williams learned he was being terminated. Sandy Yost (Nick Yost's nickname) would be replacing him in the warehouses. The enchanted hilltop would be overseen by others, still a skeleton crew.

Whether anyone knew it at the time, Hearst, Marion, and their whole entourage would soon be returning from the Beach House for a very lengthy stay at San Simeon.