

## ***Appendix V***

### **The Beach House-Ocean House and the Press**

1947–1960

During the nearly ten years that the former Hearst-Davies Beach House went by the name Ocean House under its new owner, Joseph Drown, the *Hollywood Citizen-News* and Hearst's own *Los Angeles Examiner* published five of the six articles that appear here. With their contents handed down over the years to come, the articles were influential among Hearst biographers and others who had cause to mention the Santa Monica property, a prime instance being W. A. Swanberg in *Citizen Hearst* in 1961.

It was in one of these or a similar article that Marion Davies was first quoted as saying (erroneously) that she had lived in the Beach House from 1930 to 1945.

The first article, from March 1947, indicates that the ownership of the Beach House had yet to pass from Hearst Magazines to Drown; presumably, it soon did. The claim that the mansion was “stripped of its art treasures and left unoccupied during the war” was mostly false; the only factual aspect of the claim was its allusion to the Marion Davies sale at Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, late in 1945 and the preparations leading up to that event.

Howard Heyn's article from October 1949 is more to be reckoned with. The paradox he mentioned—that “through all these years almost nothing descriptive was written” about the place—was offset by the details Heyn included. He was a reputable writer for Associated Press who would have had no reason to exaggerate or invent willfully. And yet the sources of his information remain elusive and mostly impossible to fact-check this many years afterward.

Sebastian Flyte, a fictitious name, stems from a character in Evelyn Waugh's novel of 1945, *Brideshead Revisited*. Despite being nearly eighty-eight when the article of March 4, 1951, appeared in Hearst's morning *Examiner*, Hearst alone could have been its author. His description of the Beach House as having “more columns across the back than the Supreme

Court in Washington” is one that several writers have repeated, probably without knowing whence it originally came.

The prolific Bob Thomas, though only in his mid-thirties in June 1956, had a dozen years to his credit already as the Hollywood correspondent for Associated Press. His two-part series on Ocean House has had as much or more influence than the previous three articles combined. Thomas went on to write many biographies and other books about Hollywood; he also wrote a novel that was a takeoff on Hearst and San Simeon entitled *Weekend '33*.

An unexpected item is the feature from Rhode Island's *Providence Sunday Journal* that appeared on the sixty-third birthday of Marion Davies (January 3, 1960). Historically and textually akin to its predecessors of the 1947 to 1956 range, the 1960 item says nothing whatever of William Randolph Hearst. Neither do any of the preceding items.

***Hollywood Citizen-News*** Anonymous

Thursday, March 6, 1947, p. 2

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HEARING SET ON CONVERTING MARION DAVIES HOME TO CLUB

A hearing on an application for rezoning the ornate Santa Monica beach home of Marion Davies into a private club will be conducted Monday [March 10], it was announced today [by the City of Santa Monica].

Richard Gandy, attorney for Hearst Magazines, Inc., owner of the mansion, will present the case for the applicants, who include Joseph W. Drown.

The Davies place was stripped of its art treasures and left unoccupied during the war. Hotel-size, the house was once a gathering place for motion picture and world notables.

The main drawing room glitters under a 22-carat gold-leaf [*sic*] finish. Other evidence of the structure's magnificence include rooms lined with marble and delicately-carved alabaster figures, murals of historic origin in corridors, thickly-carpeted bedroom suites, cedar-lined closets and marble fireplaces.

The main building ranks as one of the finest examples of Georgian [Revival] architecture in the United States.

Recommendation on the rezoning plea must be approved by the [Santa Monica] City Council.

***Los Angeles Examiner*** by Howard C. Heyn  
Sunday, October 16, 1949; p. 11

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MARION DAVIES' BEACH HOUSE BECOMES HOTEL; Rare Carvings and Antiques Grace Modern 'Versailles'

SANTA MONICA, Oct. 15.—Marion Davies' former beach residence of 110 rooms has become a hotel.

If you have the price (\$45 double), you can spend the night in the main suite of this architectural fantasy which boasts the wide Pacific as its front yard.

Ocean House, it's called now. In a sense, it always was a hotel. The really important celebrities who visited Hollywood while Miss Davies was a reigning film star almost always stayed there.

Counts, princesses, dukes, ambassadors and assorted tycoons enjoyed her hospitality.

*PARADOX*—

As a beach house, this sprawling establishment is a complete paradox. It might better be called Hollywood's Versailles. There are 56 bathrooms and 37 fireplaces.

Twenty years ago, when Ocean House was growing, rare mantelpieces were imported by the dozen. Entire rooms from famous British mansions were shipped intact—paneling, doors and sometimes ceilings, too.

Strangely enough, through all these years almost nothing descriptive was written about one of the world's most fabulous estates until a recent guest, formerly associated with Miss Davies, took this correspondent around the premises.

*FIVE HOUSES —*

The establishment consists of five colonial houses, strung along the beach. In 1930, when Santa Monica was still a quiet resort town, these nestled remotely between beach and palisades. Now their rear walls are sooted by the exhaust of heavy traffic on a major highway which passes immediately behind them.

Miss Davies lived in the three-story main house, a vast U-shaped structure, for fifteen years, until 1945. Adjacent were the homes of her father, her sisters, and the building housing the family's 32 servants. Gardens filled with rare plants, tennis courts, and two swimming pools completed the layout.

*110-FOOT POOL —*

The 110-foot [long] pool in front of the main terraces is lined with Italian marble. The building's façade is Vermont marble.

Beyond the impressive fan-lighted entry, an open stairwell with hanging staircases on either side rises two full stories.

Seventy-five wood carvers worked more than a year on the balustrades alone.

In the moldings around the hall ceiling are 2300 little wooden buttons, each individually bored and glued in place.

The dining room, reception room and drawing room, each 60 feet long, came from Burton Hall, County Clare, Ireland. General Burton built his castle in 1749.

Dining room doorways are from Beckington Abbey, and the carvings in this room are originals by Grindling [Grinling] Gibbons from Cassiobury Park, the country home of the Earl of Essex, in Hertfordshire.

*ABBEY DOORWAYS —*

Gibbons (1648–1721), England's famous wood carver, decorated Windsor Castle and St. Paul's Cathedral, in association with Sir Christopher Wren.

Ceilings are exact reproductions and chandeliers are hand-cut crystal from Tiffany's. The drawing room ceiling is embellished with 18-karat gold leaf, untarnishable even from sea air.

Scenic wallpaper in the second and third-floor hallways is from the old Zuber works in Alsace-Lorraine, hand-printed from blocks saved from the bombings of World War I.

The second-floor papering consists of American landscapes; that of the third floor depicts the history of horse racing in Europe.

Miss Davies' suite on the third floor has an antique English marble mantelpiece from a 1760 Georgian mansion at Sutton, Surrey. Insets are of tan striped marble, and the carved center plaque shows bacchantes pulling a barrel and drinking wine.

*PRINCE'S MANTEL* —

Two bathrooms adjoin the huge bedchamber. An equally expansive solarium-sitting room and balcony overlook the sea.

All the main suites have two closets as large as the average hotel room, cedar-lined and equipped with vaults for fur storage.

The baths of the Davies suite are colored marbles, the walls ringed with mirrors. Bathing pools are reminiscent of Roman days.

The Green room, or reception lounge, on the main floor is paneled in honey-colored pine. Its 18th Century fresco ceiling was imported from an old London town house.

New York artisans worked six months applying its gleaming gold leaf. The Georgian mantelpiece of carved marble is from 18th Century Hatton Hall, home of Oscar Wilde's mother.

Grecian columns outlined in gold leaf and a white marble mantelpiece dominate the Gold room, now the hotel bar-lounge. The mantelpiece came from the library of the home occupied by George V while Prince of Wales [1901–1910].

A vast projection room has a full-size screen that rises out of the floor. The paneled walls are carved deal [fir or pine], from Cassiobury Park.

Adjoining is the banquet room, or marine great library, paneled in carved deal wood. Once this was a sitting room in the Georgian country house of Eleanor, Duchess of Northumberland.

Below the main floor level, flanking the swimming pool, are a dozen bath dressing rooms and the rathskeller.

The latter was once an inn in Surrey, dating from 1560. Its three small rooms were cojoined at Ocean House. Paneling is Tudor, and the mantelpiece is the oldest in the house (1642).

Bar, back-bar and door trims are hand carved, dated 1560, and came from Charles of London [an art dealer in London and New York].

In one second-floor suite is a green and white marble mantel with oval Wedgwood medallions, from Admiral Batey's London town house. The East suite has a mantelpiece of green marble, from the Duke of Windsor's country house.

*UNCOMMON —*

How Ocean House grew is a story itself.

In 1926 beach houses were not yet common among film players. Miss Davies chose two remotely situated and identical houses at the base of the Palisades, and proceeded to build a center section between them.

William Flannery was engaged as architect.

The resulting two-story U-shaped structure was not considered adequate, however, and several partitions were removed. This elongation of the rooms caused ceilings to appear too low, so Miss Davies decided to jack up the second story. Then she changed her mind.

"Look," she said, "as long as we have gone this far, let's start all over and build a real house."

When sold in 1947, Ocean House served briefly as an exclusive private club. Some months ago the property became a hotel.

Thus for the first time, anyone may now enjoy the antiquities that remain at Ocean House, symbols which also mark a bygone era of movie splendor. Anyone, that is, who can pay the tariff [the room rate].

***Los Angeles Examiner*** Sebastian Flyte  
Sunday, March 4, 1951, Section III, p. 3.

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## **INVITATION TO PERSONALITIES**

*Fifth of a Series*

MARION DAVIES

Hollywood, Mar. 3.—Nowadays, the studios give out toned-down publicity about their actresses, so that we think they're just plain, ordinary wives, who have children, and little houses, and could cook if they didn't work so hard every day. They may not think so, but they're killing the star system.

We are interested in these extraordinary products of our time only because they are supposed to be more temperamental, more beautiful, more extravagant, than women in ordinary life.

*LEGENDARY* —

The word “star” itself defines some luminary body, shining brightly in the heavens. It is disappointing to be told that, nowadays, all they think about are skillets, and mop, and Christmas shopping, when not so long ago we read about Pola Negri’s leopard, Gloria Swanson’s Marquis, and Garbo’s tragic loneliness.

There were movie stars enshrouded in legends of Rolls Royces, gold bathrooms and mystery. In the public fancy they lived up to the dream of being a movie star.

There are very few actresses today, with any sort of legend at all, and if they do manage to create any illusions, there is little chance that they could touch the legend of Marion Davies.

*A SYMBOL* —

Her beach house in Santa Monica, which was the largest house of the Hollywood notables, was a colonial type structure, with more columns across the back than the Supreme Court in Washington.

These columns reflect into a marble swimming pool, not more than 30 yards from the ocean.

Five guards and 15 servants were required to run the place, and every Sunday Marion Davies held open house for the celebrated from all over the world.

The beach house is sold now [to Joseph Drown], turned into a small hotel, but people will tell you there is nothing like it in Hollywood today. There probably never will be again.

Marion Douras, which is her real name, was born in New York, and was the daughter of a well known magistrate fondly nicknamed “Judge Douras and Justice.” William O’Dwyer, later Mayor of New York [1946–1950], got his start in Judge Douras’ office. Her mother [Rose Douras], whose portrait now hangs in Marion’s dining room [in Beverly Hills], was a great beauty of her time.

The Bon Homme Richard, the famous ship of John Paul Jones, was originally named after the family of Marion Davies, which had figured for centuries in the history of France. It was later changed to the Bon Homme Richard after the fictional creation of Benjamin Franklin.

*DOURAS CHATEAU —*

Sometime ago, Marion Davies received a letter from Victor Hugo Douras, a cousin who was secretary of the French Embassy in Washington. This letter told her that the Douras chateau in Bordeaux was unoccupied. He told Marion that if she claimed and restored it she would be entitled to the title that went with the castle.

Marion loves America far too much to think of living in France. But she still looks forward to visiting this chateau, when she goes to Europe again [this side of 1936].

Marion Davies, often called one of the most beautiful [actresses], got her start in the Ziegfeld Follies. As she will tell you, she was in the chorus, and not at all a star.

From the Follies she came to Hollywood, where she played in two movies that made her a star.

She remained a star in every sense of the word until she retired [in 1937]. During that period she became a symbol in Hollywood of all that was fabulous and extraordinary.

*G. B. SHAW —*

Her jewels were incomparable with any jewels on the West Coast. Her beach house was the real capital of society out there.

George Bernard Shaw stayed there [in 1933], and General MacArthur, and the Duke of Kent and innumerable others. At her costume parties two and three orchestras played until dawn, and 50 for Sunday lunch was nothing unusual.

Her dressing room at M-G-M was as large as a house, and at luncheon there you met Senators and Governors as well as famous playwrights and actors.



*EXCITEMENT* —

One M-G-M executive remembers that Marion Davies' luncheons caused more excitement on the lot than the pictures shooting.

(The only time Bernard Shaw ventured to a studio, was to one of these luncheons [also in 1933], at which his wit is supposed to have so strongly offended Mr. John Barrymore that he stalked out in a memorable scene [while making *Dinner At Eight*].)

Once a band was called in to provide music, and actors were kept away from work for hours. Guests received wonderful favors by their plates and drank vintage champagne.

On trips to Europe Marion Davies is always entertained by notable personages and nobility. In the past she has been feted by the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, the Duke of Kent and too many others to mention.

She visits in New York with the Astors, the Vanderbilts, the Dukes and others who in turn visit her in California. Doris Duke is one of her best friends.

It was quite the most extraordinary life led by any actress in the history of the movies. It has never been equaled.

When the beach house was sold [in 1947], she bought a large Spanish style house in Beverly Hills, where she lives today [off N. Beverly Drive], comparatively quiet, if you consider how life used to be.

The house is furnished with many fine antiques; and the spacious gardens are beautiful surrounding a lovely pool and fountains. The whole world, in a way, still comes to her. Bernard Shaw, a few months ago, sent her a little picture of himself, showing how he had changed [d. November 2, 1950].

General and Mrs. MacArthur, before the Korean War, wrote her long letters about life in Japan.

You probably ask yourself how has Marion Davies remained after leading the most fabulous existence of all the movie stars?

I can only tell you that she has founded a clinic, The Marion Davies Foundation Clinic for children; that and the longest list of people to give presents to of any woman in Hollywood; that she has been a fairy godmother to her friends.

*TRIBUTES —*

The generosity of actresses is well known (you only have to see “All About Eve” [with Bette Davis] to know that). But Marion Davies’ generosity tops them all.

And I can only tell you what three people said about her. Pola Negri told me Marion Davies is the only woman in Hollywood you never hear anything ugly about.

Mary Sanford said when I first arrived in Hollywood, “Don’t tell Marion you don’t have a car. She’ll give you one.”

And Tennessee Williams, who had never met her before said after leaving her house, after dinner: “She makes up for all the rest of Hollywood.”

More than anyone else I know, Marion Davies exemplifies that saying: “God knows whom to give the breaks to.” More than anyone else, she stands for what a movie star ought to be like.

***Hollywood Citizen-News*** Bob Thomas

Monday, June 18, 1956 Part 1 of 2

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**MARION DAVIES’ HOME****FAMED BEACH HOUSE TO BECOME MOTEL**

HOLLYWOOD (AP)—Ocean House will soon be no more. Thus will pass the most notable reminder of Hollywood’s splendiferous era.

That was the roaring ‘20s, when the booming film industry made millionaires out of movie stars. That was when you could live like a millionaire, too, as did Marion Davies. She poured \$3,250,000 into a beach home that has been called the Versailles of Hollywood, after the lavish palace of French kings.

**ANOTHER MOTEL**

Now the huge manor is to be torn down. It will be replaced by a more up-to-date feature of American culture: a motel.

What a place it was. Fifty-five bathrooms and 37 fireplaces. Entire rooms from famous English mansions. A 110-foot swimming pool lined with Italian marble.

These were the surroundings in which the blonde actress entertained the movie greats and visiting royalty. The place consisted of five colonial houses nestled between the Santa Monica Palisades and the Pacific sands. The present owner, Joseph Drown, plans to tear down the main house and two others [of the five buildings] to make room for a drive-in hotel. The other two buildings and the pool will remain as a beach club.

Recently I paid a visit to the Davies mansion. It was a grey day and no one was around the huge swimming pool, which operates as part of the Sand and Sea Club nowadays. Manager Thomas Huber said this will be the third summer that Ocean House has been closed.

“We had only 30 rooms [available or occupied],” he explained. “It was just too expensive to run the place. It took too much to open and close it every season.”

### **IMPORTED ROOMS**

He handed me the keys to the main house, and I wandered through the darkened halls. First stop was the rathskeller on the lower level. Now dusty and worn, it had been a favorite gathering place for more intimate parties—say, 50 or less. Originally it had been an inn in Surrey, dating back to 1560. The mantelpiece was the oldest in the house; it was marked 1642.

On the main floor I found one ornate room after another . . . the dining room, reception room and drawing room came from Burton Hall, County Clare, Ireland, and each of them is 60 feet long.

The feature of the upstairs is the Marion Davies Suite. The marble mantel, carved with wine-drinking cherubs, was from a 1760 Georgian mansion at Sutton, Surrey. The mural wallpaper cost \$7,500. The suite has twin bathrooms of colored marble.

Yes, it's quite a place.

*Tomorrow: The fabulous history of the Marion Davies' Home.*

***Hollywood Citizen-News*** Bob Thomas

Tuesday, June 19, 1956 Part 2 of 2

**LITTLE ACORNS****DAVIES' COTTAGE GREW AND GREW**

HOLLYWOOD (AP)—In 1926, Marion Davies decided to create a beach home.

Before she was finished, the screen star poured millions into what became the most lavish showplace in the film colony.

**MODEST HOME**

It all started in the era when the film famous were going in for beach houses. Miss Davies wanted one and chose a couple of identical buildings on the Santa Monica shore. She wired architect William Flannery to hurry westward to design a 15-foot hallway to connect the two buildings. The job was to cost \$7,500.

But one thing seemed to lead to another. The rooms seemed to be too small, so they had to be enlarged. The new hallway made the ceilings seem too low. Someone suggested jacking up the second floor.

The blonde actress concluded, "Look, as long as you've gone this far, let's start fresh and do a real house."

When the main house was finished in 1930, the bill came to \$1-3/4 million.

How could a single house cost that much? It was easy in those free-spending days. Agents shopped all over the British Isles to find rooms in ancient manors that could be transported wholly to the Davies home. Many of the 37 fireplaces were 200 to 300 years old. The chandeliers were hand-cut crystal from Tiffany's.

The balustrades alone took the efforts of 75 craftsmen carving for a year.

**COST \$3 MILLION**

By the time Miss Davies completed the whole project, there were five buildings, including those to house her father, sisters and the 32 servants who

staffed the place. The construction was reported to have cost over \$3 million and the furnishing to have added another \$4 million.

For 15 years [1930 to 1945], the Davies mansion was one of the centers of Hollywood society.

In 1945, the actress tired of the huge home and moved to a more modest mansion in Beverly Hills. After auctioning off the furnishings [at Parke-Bernet in New York, December 1945], she sold the place in 1947 for \$600,000. Observers estimated [that] that was about what the fireplaces had cost her.

Promoters tried to run the place as a private club, but soon met financial failure. In 1949, it was done over as a lavish hotel called Ocean House.

The hotel proved too costly to maintain. It closed down two years ago, with part of the property continuing as a beach club. The white paint began to peel from the once spotless exterior.

### **PROJECT FOUGHT**

Last month owner Joseph Drown asked permission to tear down the main building and two others to erect a 20-unit motel. His request was fought by nearby residents [along Ocean Front] Harold Lloyd and Darryl Zanuck, who claimed it would lead to deterioration of the beach front property. But the city of Santa Monica granted the hotelman's application.

Demolition is expected to begin at the end of summer, thus erasing a glorious remnant of Hollywood's past.

***Providence Sunday Journal*** (Providence, Rhode Island) James Bacon  
January 3, 1960, p. W-12

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### **SALE RECALLS GOLDEN ERA**

Hollywood—(AP)—The site that once held Marion Davies' seven-million-dollar beach house soon will be a parking lot.

And that just about tells the whole story of what income tax has done to the mode of living among movie stars.

Miss Davies, who now lives in a Beverly Hills mansion that is still fabulous by today's standards, thinks it a shame that her house is no longer.

"It should never have been torn down," she told a reporter. "It could have been kept open for the public to see. It was an artistic and historic masterpiece."

Real estate man J. W. Drown, present owner of the land, is selling it to the state of California for use in its master beach plan for the Santa Monica waterfront. A state source reports that Mr. Drown's selling price was "relatively low" considering the market value of the land, which is near expensive beach homes owned by Darryl Zanuck and Harold Lloyd.

But a condition of sale for the Davies property was that Mr. Drown be able to lease back the land for \$20,000 a year for use as a 900-car parking lot.

Twenty thousand is a paltry sum compared with the millions that Miss Davies poured into the place to make it literally the Versailles of Hollywood.

Back about the time of the 1929 stock crash, movie stars were making so much money that it was frustrating finding ways to spend it. [Harold] Lloyd, who was earning a reported \$60,000 a week with most of it take-home pay, built a magnificent estate [in Beverly Hills] with [an] 18-hole-golf course and a Yosemite-like waterfall. Other stars put thousands into beach houses that were more like hotels than ocean hideaways.

Miss Davies, then a reigning queen of Hollywood, decided she must have an ocean home and bought two buildings for a price she has long forgotten.

She does recall ordering a \$7,500 hallway to connect the two buildings. Somehow the hallway made the ceilings in the houses too low and the rooms too small.

"Let's start over and build a new house from the ground up," Marion decreed.

And what a house. When it was finished in 1930, the price tag was \$1,750,000—and building materials didn't cost as much then. But that was only the start.

Miss Davies had agents scour Europe to find rooms in ancient manors of impoverished nobility. Whole rooms were transported intact to Santa Monica. Chandeliers were hand-cut crystal from Tiffany's. A downstairs rathskeller with room for 50 persons had once been an inn in Surrey, England, dating back to 1560.

In the 15 years that Miss Davies lived there she estimates she put three millions in the house and four millions more in furnishings. When she sold the place in 1945, she got \$600,000, almost to the dollar what the 37 fireplaces, many of them 300 years old, had cost her.

For awhile the place was run as a private club and later as a hotel. But the main house had only 30 rooms and it just didn't pay off. A few years ago the main building was demolished and art collectors bought up the expensive paneling and fixtures for a song. Many movie studios were among the lucky bidders and now some of Marion Davies' period rooms are being used to give authentic background to movies.

Still standing on the land are several guest houses and buildings which once housed servants. These buildings, mansions by today's standards, are now used as a private beach club. State officials say they probably will continue on that basis with the site of the main house [becoming] the public parking area.

Mr. Drown also has asked permission to build a cafeteria style restaurant on the land as part of the deal.

Marion has spent lots of money on herself but she has spent millions more on others. When a star finishes a picture nowadays, he gives each member of the crew a gift [of] a wrist watch or a bottle of liquor.

But Marion's idea of a gift was to give a crew member's son a four-year scholarship to a medical school or pay off a staggering hospital debt. She still hands out plenty of money. Associates estimate she has given away more than 10 million dollars in a 26-year war [since 1933] against childhood diseases.

Construction will start this spring on the new Marion Davies Children's Clinic at the Medical Center of the University of California at Los Angeles. It was made possible by a bequest of \$1,900,000 from Miss Davies.

"I'll probably be remembered more for the parties I gave at the beach house," says Miss Davies, "but the clinic is the real joy of my life."

Marion doesn't think Hollywood will ever see [again] the kind of social life that she once dominated.

"They don't have the colorful people any more," she concludes sadly.