Introduction

THE TITLE *HEARST AND MARION: The Santa Monica Connection* has been carefully chosen. The *Hearst and Marion* part identifies the two principals in our story. Hearst was of course William Randolph Hearst; Marion was Marion Davies. Why the last name for him but only the first name for her? Because that's how this couple is most widely known today. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. When at Hearst Castle, San Simeon, speak as the guides have spoken for many years, as in "Hearst and Marion." And now at the new Annenberg Community Beach House, Santa Monica, speak as the docents are speaking, as in "Hearst and Marion." The trend has caught on there; the idiom endures. It means no disrespect, no flippancy for us to refer to the couple this way. In fact, it wouldn't be farfetched to call them W. R. and Marion, as their close friends did. Yet that would be getting a bit too casual for our purposes. Hearst and Marion is better, is fully attuned, is destined to last.

In the subtitle, *The Santa Monica Connection*, the "Santa Monica" part naturally denotes a place, a setting. A grand mansion called the Beach House once stood along the shoreline there, built by Hearst and Marion and often known by its informal address, 415 Ocean Front. The "Connection" part has multiple meanings. As one of Hollywood's earliest power couples, Hearst and Marion were all but inseparably connected through 415 Ocean Front. The Santa Monica mansion was in turn connected with their diverse and eventful lives for two decades, from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, a period dominated by San Simeon and, somewhat later, by its counterpart in Northern California, Wyntoon. This book will explore these various connections in detail, though it will fall short of being exhaustive, despite its thickness. Think of it as a serious attempt at documentary history, a

book sure to be bettered eventually yet one that's aimed for now at subjects that have long deserved a fuller airing.

I'll usually call the Santa Monica mansion the Beach House, as did Hearst and Marion from back when they initially hired a young designer named William Flannery to be the architect of their new place. (Certain other celebrities along Ocean Front called their homes "the beach house" as well, but the Hearst-Davies example warranted capitalizing more than all the rest.) "The Beach House" applies to the long-demolished main building of that seaside compound and to its immediate surroundings, much as "Hearst Castle" means both the twin-towered Casa Grande at San Simeon and its related features in that hilltop setting. I won't be using "Ocean House" as a more noble-sounding synonym for the Beach House, as has too often been wrongly done: Ocean House (often spelled Oceanhouse) has its rightful status but only as a later name, bestowed in the 1940s by the new owner, Joseph Drown, a luxury hotelier. I'll also avoid calling the place "the Marion Davies Estate" or, more casually, "Marion's house," as many once did and as many still do, thus keeping Marion in the spotlight and unknowingly keeping Hearst right where he wanted to be: out of that same spotlight to the point of negation almost, leaving him in a historical limbo that suited the complex ways of a man who, all the while, remained married for almost fifty years to his only wife, Millicent Willson Hearst of New York.

And even though in 1942 a renowned memoirist, the actress and writer Ilka Chase, called the place "the Hearst-Davies mansion" in her book *Past Imperfect*, the name didn't catch on, didn't stick. I'll not be adamant about using that hyphenated form all these years later, never mind that the Associated Press correspondent Bob Thomas spoke in 1990 of "his Santa Monica mansion," meaning Hearst's—this in the Thomas biography *Clown Prince of Hollywood: The Antic Life and Times of Jack L. Warner*. Instead, I'll firmly argue that, with a joint

Hearst-Davies legacy in mind, the Beach House should confidently be regarded as *their* place, much as Maria Riva did in 1992, calling it "their beach mansion" in her biography of her mother, Marlene Dietrich.

The alternative to "the Beach House" that I'll often use is the name of its municipal host, Santa Monica. The city's northwestern limits include the area lying past Wilshire Boulevard and the California Incline along Palisades Beach Road, which served as the formal address of the Beach House and which gave the property its official name in city directories: 415 Palisades Beach Road. "Ocean Front" was a popular, local variant decades ago for addresses ranging from 195 to 1200 on Palisades Beach Road. Such nuances of nomenclature aside, Ocean Front and Palisades Beach Road and even Roosevelt Highway are all names that can be associated with what is more widely known today as PCH (Pacific Coast Highway) or simply as Highway 1. In addition, I'll periodically say "Los Angeles" in a loosely synonymous way, mostly in reference to Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Culver City, or other parts of the greater Westside.

It took signing on as a tour guide at Hearst Castle in 1972 for me to hear the name "Beach House" for the first time. Our reading list included W. A. Swanberg's breakthrough book of 1961, *Citizen Hearst: A Biography of William Randolph Hearst*. Its photos depicted a setting I instantly recognized from my younger years in the greater area; the caption merely said "Beach house at Santa Monica." The words appeared under a heading of "SIX HEARST CASTLES," as in San Simeon, Wyntoon, and their brethren, although the text of Swanberg's book had him speaking of *seven* Hearst Castles, four of them being Casa Grande and its trio of smaller outlying houses at Hearst's best-known estate, synonymous with Hearst Castle in the singular. In clucking about Hearst's largesse, the old-time guides at the

Castle talked a standard line of “the place he built for Marion in Santa Monica.”

Amazing, I thought. I’ve driven by it a thousand times!

In addition, 1972 itself saw the publication of *Marion Davies*, the biography by Fred Lawrence Guiles that remains invaluable all these years later, its author having gained entrée to what can be called the Marion Davies Collection, a group of documents that most people, myself included, have never seen firsthand and that have since, according to insiders, been largely dispersed among dealers and collectors.

It wasn’t long before I exhausted the few pictures of the Beach House to be found in print. Written descriptions, however brief, were another thing: there were no doubt some I would never be finding, no matter how much I dug, accounts buried in faded books about Hollywood and the film industry or all but lost in equally old newspapers and magazines. Ah, but I could always drive now past the site on PCH, as I’d innocently done so many times before. After all, my in-laws lived in Santa Monica and, in 1973, my own parents moved to the Palos Verdes area. This put the Beach House–Ocean House era’s successor, the smaller Sand and Sea Club, squarely in our path every time my wife and I drove from San Luis Obispo County to the Southland.

From 1973 to 1975 I was hot on the trail of Hearst’s main architect in California, Julia Morgan of San Francisco, who overlapped on the early years of the Santa Monica job with the young freelancer I mentioned before, William Flannery. Miss Morgan had the highest credentials, Flannery far less so. In fact, Morgan has been called the most gifted, accomplished woman ever to practice architecture in this country. And yet outside Berkeley and elsewhere in the Bay Area few aficionados were bothering in the early 1970s to track down her work,

especially in the Southland—examples like the Hollywood Studio Club or even Hearst's Los Angeles Examiner Building. Therein lay the rub with Santa Monica. No mansion remained to be seen, lost to the wrecking ball nearly twenty years past. Only lesser, extraneous details clung to the site, such as the drab colonial building at the north end of the Beach House compound: nothing much about that to arouse wonder. True, the swimming pool still boasted its coping and decorative tile work and its artfully troweled decks with serpentine inserts unmistakably like those at San Simeon's Neptune Pool. Same architect and sometimes the same materials, same artisans, I would later learn. However, the elongated Beach House pool was impossible to see from PCH. It lay between a parking lot (post-1956 demolition) and a bulkhead of thick pier pilings (a relic of former days), meant to hold back the ever-encroaching sand, which, unchecked, would soon have buried the pool completely.

The year 1975 is noteworthy. It saw the publication of a book that's been a mixed blessing ever since: *The Times We Had: Life with William Randolph Hearst*, based on tape-recorded reminiscences of Marion Davies dating from 1951, made the very year Hearst died. In its best moments, Marion's memoir is revealing, illuminating, insightful. In its worst moments, the same compilation is confused, deceptive, disorienting. Had alcoholism taken its toll? Indeed it had. At one point, in the context of the thirties decade and a discussion of her father, Bernard Douras, who died in 1935, Marion came forth with what can only be called an incriminating passage—if we choose to take her at her word:

> The trouble with people who fib, like my father, is that you tell everybody a different story and you expect them to believe it. I guess I [his youngest daughter] took after him, that way.

Earlier in her memoir, in an unrelated context, she said of herself that she was “known as liar number one” to certain people around her. Such passages give at least momentary pause, surely.

In any case, I’m vague—as vague as Marion could often be—in recalling what we San Simeonites knew, or thought we knew, about the Beach House as of the mid-1970s. I asked John Porter, my editor for almost that long and a part-timer at the Castle since 1971, if his memory was any sharper than mine. “We knew that Morgan had been Hearst’s architect at San Simeon and at Wyntoon,” he replied by e-mail, “and so I think we just assumed that she had been his architect in Santa Monica.” Well put. I’d say those words effectively capture the wishful, uncritical viewpoint of the times. Fred Guiles was one writer who’d mentioned William Flannery, though without naming Julia Morgan in the same context. Marion, for her part, didn’t mention Flannery or Morgan in what became *The Times We Had* (she merely spoke of “the architects”). Yet ironically, and despite its often loopy, disjointed nature, Marion’s memoir contains some important details about the Beach House that have stood the test of time and that now, more than thirty years after their publication, still have few peers among accounts of Santa Monica, whether archival or secondhand. Hence the mixed blessing I spoke of.

But such distinctions mattered little in the mid-seventies. The world of Hearstiana among us San Simeonites would start turning upside down in 1977. Until then, architectural history was to us a remote process. We firmly believed that not a scrap of Julia Morgan’s records had survived past the 1940s or, to shade things a bit differently, past the time of Hearst’s death in 1951. We innocents also believed that Hearst was a man who had kept no records of his own. One of the fonder tenets of our near-tribal myth was that his keen memory could hold no limit of intricate and arcane details. As to Marion’s memoir of 1951/1975, it was a work whose often madcap

value would come into focus much later, when the branching out and flourishing of Hearstiana provided a greater range of knowledge for the book to be weighed against. Again, a mixed blessing is what *The Times We Had* has proved to be.

The summer of 1977—I starting my sixth year at Hearst Castle, John Porter his seventh—dropped a talisman in my lap. Or perhaps its opposite. I've never been completely sure which. All I know is that I remain under a potent spell more than thirty years later. This Rosetta Stone had its namesake in Lynn Forney Stone, as of the 1990s Lynn Forney McMurray, born in 1943 and christened a goddaughter of Julia Morgan (Lynn's mother, Lilian, was Miss Morgan's secretary for many years). The Rosetta part applied in 1977 to hundreds of pages of primary documents, saved by Lynn's parents from the days when the Morgan office was still active in San Francisco and Mr. and Mrs. Forney were both on the payroll—documents that Lynn put copies of in my eager hands. Then in 1999 and 2000, more than two decades later, Lynn enriched me with further copies of what we've been calling the Morgan-Forney Collection ever since.

The first bestowal from this great patron allowed me to specialize for many years in Hearst as a collector. Her second bestowal allowed me to expand a book of mine from 1990 that became my magnum opus of 2003, *Building for Hearst and Morgan: Voices from the George Loorz Papers.* Both of those gestures by Lynn Forney McMurray, those windfalls of 1977 and 1999–2000, strengthened my grasp of what the Beach House had been. Vitally so, indispensably so.

From the earliest of those dates—from 1977 onward—the trips that my wife and I took from the San Luis Obispo area down U.S. 101, veering off at Oxnard on PCH past Malibu and Pacific Palisades en route to Santa Monica, cast a wholly new light for me on 415 Ocean Front, site of that once-grand mansion that had stood for thirty years. (But that's only if we count its oldest portions, dating from the late

1920s. Morgan's last job ledger on Santa Monica, albeit for nothing more than some minor outdoor work, dates mostly from 1938, a mere eighteen years before the wreckers arrived.)

In any event, the "Pacific Coast Register" that Lynn McMurray copied for me reflected the Morgan office's West Coast file-keeping system. Morgan began compiling it in 1919 for the sake of Hearst, the year they made their first concerted efforts to get started at San Simeon; Hearst's mother, the philanthropist Phoebe Apperson Hearst, had recently died and, pending the settlement of her estate, that idyllic coastal property was now his. Actual groundbreaking on "the hill" took place early in 1920. By 1937, a dark date in Hearst's often stormy life, the protracted Depression threatening to ruin him by then, Morgan could describe the P C Register as encompassing virtually everything of Hearst's received or transshipped by her as his architect, registrar, warehouse liaison, and still other roles she'd been playing for the past eighteen years, both traditional and anything but. That is, everything comprising the Hearst Collection that reached California by rail from New York—the main conduit of the man's supply line from 1920 to 1937—plus a goodly number of rogue or unique shipments he ordered: by rail, by truck, by tramp steamer from a diversity of sources, all of this surpassing what any other American collector-builder had ever done: all of this activity filling 660 pages in the P C Register. Their 10,000-plus entries pertained to single items, to pairs or sets or still larger groups of items. PC 5057 alone, easily taking the cake, applied to a dismantled Spanish monastery that remains in California and that's being partially re-erected now, at long last, by a religious order north of Sacramento.

An outsized ledger, as if made for a giant, its pages slightly longer than today's legal-size paper and nearly two inches wider (a real trick to photocopy), the P C Register was the least the Morgan office could produce for the outsized Hearst Collection. That's what Lynn Forney

McMurray's father, H. C. Forney—Jim he was called—typed in 1937 from individual file cards. Lynn retains the crisp, massive, original bond-paper typescript, held in a stout buckram binding, a Paul Bunyan of account books. Hearst Castle has a dimmer mimeograph copy from the same period, an archival rarity in its own right yet one that's incomplete when compared with what Jim Forney compiled (and that he and his wife, Lilian—Lynn's mother, the trusted right-hand woman of Miss Morgan's—took home to Berkeley for safekeeping along with other items, historically priceless records in every instance, when Morgan retired in 1950).

Back to the Beach House. And back to San Simeon and Wyntoon, each of them much better known among Hearst's California "castles" that he developed with Morgan's help. The latter two places wouldn't be nearly as decipherable as they've become since the late 1970s were it not for the P C Register and other Morgan-Forney items. True, that collection is still privately held by Lynn McMurray. Yet with her concurrence I began disseminating its contents even before 1977 ended; I've never stopped doing so, both through the tours and the staff workshops I led at San Simeon (I remained there till 1983) and, over the longer run, through my various books—above all, through *Building for Hearst and Morgan* of 2003 and also through *Hearst as Collector,* likewise of 2003. True as well, Cal Poly State University in San Luis Obispo has had the Julia Morgan Collection since 1980, the archives most responsible through my efforts and those of others for the in-depth view of San Simeon—especially the San Simeon of the formative 1920s—that had previously been beyond everyone's reach. But without the P C Register, directly or indirectly, too many references at Cal Poly to art works, to architectural elements, to carload shipments from the East, and to numerous related details would make almost no sense at all. The San Simeon warehouse files, dating from

the 1920s and subsequent decades and partly available through Hearst Castle since 1978, have provided close corroboration.

Since 1990, the George Loorz Papers have constituted the same microscope for Wyntoon that the Julia Morgan Collection provides for the early years at San Simeon. In turn, these two archives, plus the Morgan-Forney Collection, the old warehouse files, and, as of the late 1970s, the William Randolph Hearst Papers at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, throw more light on the Beach House than we may ever be glimpsing otherwise.

It's by such means, coupled with deductive reasoning and a goodly amount of circumstantial evidence, that the Hearst-Davies Beach House in Santa Monica stands out for what it was: a project less than one tenth the monetary stature of mighty San Simeon (which I've called elsewhere "the mother of all accounts") and less than one half that of Wyntoon, a distant second-place finisher on Morgan's overall job list (Santa Monica came in sixth). In the roundest, most general figures, measured against the design and construction outlays Hearst made through Morgan (plus that which William Flannery and others got paid), Santa Monica may have cost Hearst about $400,000 in 1920s and 1930s dollars, easily four to six million in today's money. The furnishing of the place with antiques and art objects, exemplifying his usual methods, represents a separate figure, one harder to calculate on top of building costs. The grand total may have been two million dollars or so, to judge from what Hearst told Morgan about the Beach House in 1932 ("Miss Davies has over a million dollars worth of pictures [paintings] in it, and perhaps half a million dollars worth of other valuables").

Never forget, though, that the embellishment of Santa Monica reflected the tastes and the trappings of *two* collectors, W. R. Hearst and Marion Davies, not that of the controlling, paternal Hearst alone, as portrayals of him usually go. One or two million dollars it may have

been, but on this score it was to a very great degree *their* one or two million, a sorting out of which would be well nigh impossible.

Whence the notion, at any rate, of three or four times that amount, as in the feature done for *Architectural Digest* by the celebrity biographer Anne Edwards in 1994? In large part from the world of Hearstian hoopla and exaggeration, whose limits seem boundless still, scarcely less today than they did decades ago. The very endurance of such beliefs, their range and staying power, prove that Hearst succeeded hugely with the show he staged at 415 Ocean Front. There was Davies hoopla in the equation also, through *The Times We Had* of 1975 and its editors' note that Marion herself had "told reporters" in 1960 "that she had spent over seven million dollars on the place during the fifteen years she had used it" (the article in question was by James Bacon and appears in Appendix V).

But what specifically of the paneled rooms from Europe, the thirty-seven fireplaces, likewise imported, and the various other royal touches, none of them inexpensive, that we've so often heard about?

Questions like these remain to be answered better than they have been thus far, whether by Marion's memoir or by other means. Such questions may never have needed to be so loudly raised in the first place. And yet we're talking to a great extent about William Randolph Hearst, the prototype for *Citizen Kane*, a man who supposedly never did things simply or on the cheap or without pageantry, though perhaps he really did so to a surprising degree in Santa Monica. If indeed he did, the last laugh was his (and his young paramour's), and Julia Morgan's too.

As early as 1949, two years before Hearst died in old age, his own *Los Angeles Examiner* ran an article by Howard Heyn, an Associated Press writer whose subject was the former Beach House. W. A. Swanberg may have seen Heyn's article as early as 1958 in researching

Citizen Hearst. He may also have seen the souvenir booklet produced about 1950 by Joseph Drown, the Beach House's new owner, for his chic clientele in Santa Monica, a booklet entitled *Oceanhouse: America's Most Beautiful Hotel.* The Heyn article was reprinted in *Oceanhouse*; so was further text that may also have been Heyn's work. Swanberg's footnotes show that he used another article in the *Los Angeles Examiner* from 1951, this one almost certainly written by Hearst himself under a pen name. In addition, Swanberg saw the two pieces that Bob Thomas wrote for the *Hollywood Citizen-News* in 1956, shortly before the razing of Ocean House (Appendix III contains most of these items).

The Heyn article and similar period pieces are what all recountings of 415 Ocean Front derive from more than anything else, to their authors' conscious knowledge or not. From Swanberg's biography of 1961 to the *Architectural Digest* feature by Anne Edwards in 1994, "Marion Davies' Ocean House: The Santa Monica Palace Ruled by Hearst's Mistress," the foregoing holds true. (As of the mid-seventies, Marion's problematic memoir of 1951/1975 needs to be cited along with the Heyn and Thomas articles and the other period sources.) The mileage that these items have accrued can't be gauged; suffice it to say it's much greater than their creators in years like 1949 or 1951 or 1956 could ever have expected.

Certainly the long-awaited appearance in 1988 of Sara Holmes Boutelle's *Julia Morgan: Architect,* which came out six years before the Anne Edwards feature, did little to put Hearst, Marion, or Julia Morgan on the Santa Monica map. Its revised and updated edition of 1995 did no better. Not a spring chicken when her book appeared (she was already in her sixties when she began researching Morgan's life in 1972, a retirement project to fill her widowhood), Sara Boutelle always struggled with Los Angeles and the Southland. She was a New Yorker now living in Santa Cruz, south of San Francisco, hundreds of miles

from L.A. Places like Culver City and Brentwood and imprecise designations like the Westside mostly befuddled her. Yet she insisted on taking little counsel. The Morgan-Forney material lay beyond her reach, to her distinct disadvantage and that of her readers still today. She was ill equipped to make sense of 415 Ocean Front.

My work on George Loorz, builder extraordinaire, began in 1988, during the same summer that the Boutelle book appeared; it was a project spurred by Loorz's second son, Bill. I soon realized that George Loorz boasted more of a Hearstian legacy than San Simeon alone. There were also Wyntoon and, very early in his career, in 1927 and 1928, the Beach House in Santa Monica. It was on that job that he first worked for the greater good of Hearst and Morgan (and again of Marion as well). Loorz was a devoted correspondent and just as much a packrat who saved hundreds of incoming letters, even thousands of them, along with carbons of outgoing ones. Sadly, the Beach House files he'd taken home to Berkeley after his stint in Santa Monica ended in 1928 were last heard of in 1936. The pages that follow would surely be the richer had those files come my way with all the others his sons entrusted to me, files that, in turn, the Loorz family gave to the San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum in 1990. That year saw the publication of my first book on the Loorz Papers, *The Builders Behind the Castles*. A decade later, in 2001, midway through my revision-expansion of *Builders* (which became *Building for Hearst and Morgan*, done through the good offices of Bill Loorz once more and also through those of William R. Hearst III), I began dovetailing the Morgan-Forney data of 1999–2000—that plus Beach House details gleaned from the Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library.

It was still too soon, though, for the inclusion of the George & Rosalie Hearst Collection, acquired by the same Will Hearst III in 2003. Fortunately, this new book on the Beach House makes full use of that historically vibrant material.

My in-laws had moved in 1991 from Santa Monica to San Luis Obispo, a change that, along with my father's death in 1992, found my wife and me driving along PCH less and less—until our two daughters began college in Los Angeles later in the nineties. Little seemed to be happening in dear old Santa Monica at 415 anyway. The colonial building, separately numbered 321, stood as lonesome as ever at the north end of the property. Joseph Drown's Sand and Sea Club locker building still stood nearby, wind-buffeted and bleached white in the sun. The Northridge earthquake of 1994 was the structural *coup de grace* for what remained of the Beach House–Ocean House compound. The Annenberg Foundation grant and the efforts on behalf of the City of Santa Monica by the group called 415 PCH lay a ways ahead yet.

Today, early in a new century and also early in what promises to be a period having a greater grasp of and appreciation for the 415 site, the new Annenberg Community Beach House, its name well attuned to the parlance of yore, faces the Pacific much as Hearst and Marion and their guests did, a vantage point that on clear afternoons affords views toward Malibu and Point Dume on par almost with those from the poetic heights of San Simeon. History and heritage haunt 415 Ocean Front in the best sense; and in our looking back on those qualities, we must remember that truth is always stranger than fiction. The pages to follow will strive to uphold that adage.