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Beginnings, Precedents, Patterns

LOS ANGELES, dawn of the twentieth century. William Randolph Hearst, forty years old, a first-term Congressman from Manhattan whose main business was newspapers (San Francisco, New York, Boston, Chicago), appeared on the local scene in 1903, the same year that he married Millicent Willson, his wife forever more—until he died, that is, in 1951. (Back in 1903, meanwhile, Marion Davies was but a Brooklyn-born girl of six.) Hearst's father, Senator George Hearst, had been in the Southland as early as 1889, along with Leland Stanford and other senators that the L.A. Chamber of Commerce courted on behalf of San Pedro as a world seaport. Both of the Hearsts, father and son, had a good eye for land prospects. The chances that they discussed how promising Southern California looked in its pre-smog grandeur aren't farfetched at all, although no such documentation seems to exist.

In any event, it was in 1903 that W. R. Hearst (as he'd come to be called) established—with his wealthy mother's usual help—the *Los Angeles Examiner* as a morning daily, largely to oppose the blustering Harrison Gray Otis and the frontier, anti-union politics of what was then the main paper in town, the *Los Angeles Times*.

Late in 1911 Hearst, then forty-eight, acquired a second newspaper in Los Angeles, at the very same moment that women in California won the right to vote—in fact, Hearst bought the paper from none other than Harrison Gray Otis—namely, the *Los Angeles Herald*. Their agreement specified that Hearst would convert what had been a morning paper to a non-competing evening. Strange to say, the date 1922 has been cited many times for Hearst's purchase of the *Herald;* this stemmed from his having gone through a dummy buyer to shield

his identity. Not so, though, on the 1922 part. The actual date of 1911 means that Hearst had a two-paper, morning-evening presence in Los Angeles at least a year before he had the equivalent in his hometown of San Francisco. It also means he was more prominently an Angeleno businessman than most have recognized, albeit an absentee one much of the time, during the 1910s. His groundbreaking in 1912 through the San Francisco architect Julia Morgan for the Examiner Building at 11th and South Broadway can now be seen in a different light: Hearst provided himself with the nucleus of a new West Coast power center rather than simply an outpost far removed from his Eastern headquarters.

As for 1910 itself, when D. W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, and their Biograph troupe from New York came to Los Angeles for the first time, there to winter at the posh Alexandria Hotel, Hearst's presence meant that they got to know him. He was in town early that year to promote the Dominguez Air Meet near Long Beach through the *Examiner,* and he asked who the pretty young girl with all the blond locks might be. Henry E. Huntington also promoted the historic air show in 1910; but unlike Hearst, who was thirteen years younger, Huntington, about to turn sixty, declined to go aloft that winter with any of the daredevil aviators.

A native Californian, Hearst had lived in New York since 1895 and counted Manhattan as his main residence for nearly three decades, until 1924. It was then, while entering his sixties, that he and the young film actress who was still in her twenties and whom he'd long been squiring—Marion Douras, or Marion Davies by stage name—came out, geographically and in other ways, to a Los Angeles he knew well and already had a serious financial stake in. His separation (but never divorce) from his wife over the Davies affair and his prominence in a film industry that kept moving west were the main stimuli. Also, the fabled San Simeon "castle" project, which he'd launched in 1919 after

summering in that remote coastal area with his family for several years, was now steaming along full speed under Julia Morgan, who concurrently was entering the busiest phase in her fifty years of practice. Hearst not only promoted Marion Davies through his Cosmopolitan Productions, founded in New York in 1918 and the studio behind many non-Davies pictures as well, he also through his newspapers, magazines, and other media holdings promoted Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, with which he and Marion were business partners on a lordly scale. What's more, Hearst's newsreel interests would keep him directly involved with Louis B. Mayer and the other Loew's-MGM titans for the rest of his long, always complex life.

With regard to archives, on which this book prefers to lean, the mid-1920s amount to ancient times for the newly Los Angeles-based Hearst, who at first held court at the equally new Ambassador Hotel on Wilshire Boulevard. He and Marion later had their palatial Beach House, humbly called, in Santa Monica, still widely thought of today as "Marion's place," an instance of Hearstian propaganda at its most effective and enduring. Hearst's master files, such as his San Simeon correspondence with Julia Morgan, were still being kept in New York in the 1920s. And thus as all Hearst researchers know, the only documents among the William Randolph Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library from any time in the twenties decade tend to be scattered and incomplete.

It's fitting to dwell on Hearst himself at the outset of our story for two reasons. First, because the Beach House was his and Marion's—it was *theirs,* rather than his or hers. The only thing that undermined this simple fact was the lack of a marriage license. Secondly, the Beach House was a satellite of strategic San Simeon (and later of Wyntoon also), not the reverse, not a Southland focal point around which outlying San Simeon and Wyntoon orbited, despite their remoteness from urban life in California.

Above all, to understand the Beach House requires that we understand W. R. Hearst, really more so than our having a good grasp of Marion Davies as a biographical subject. For better or for worse, these were male-oriented, male-dominated times. Women didn't vote in national elections until 1920, just six years before work began in Santa Monica. Had Hearst and Marion been married, these points and others like them wouldn't need much weighing. People would readily accept that he, the one with the constant drive to build and beautify and modify and perfect, was doing such things for *them*, with Marion going along dutifully for the ride (and by enough accounts doing so cheerfully, agreeably, compatibly). The question, therefore, isn't so much how Hearst figured in the life of the Beach House as it is how the Beach House figured in the life of Hearst—and, up to a supportive point, how it figured in the lives of Marion Davies and Julia Morgan. Also, the degree to which the Beach House can serve as a vehicle of history, much as San Simeon, Wyntoon, and Hearst have long been richly evocative vehicles, has to be judged. The verdict is that the story of San Simeon and Wyntoon is too intricate to be told through their Santa Monica satellite whereas the story of the latter—of the Beach House, that is—can to a great degree be told through details directly pertaining to San Simeon and at times to Wyntoon.

IF WE'RE TO UNDERSTAND Hearst, we need to absorb at least one biography of the man, preferably more. W. A. Swanberg's *Citizen Hearst* of 1961 wasn't the first biography (six others preceded it). But it was Swanberg's book that established the chronology of Hearst's nearly ninety-year life better than anyone else had. David Nasaw's biography of 2000, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, is strong on chronology also; think of it as a book that takes up where Swanberg leaves off and, in its best moments, surpasses it; if read in tandem with *Citizen Hearst*, many bases in Hearstiana can be covered.

In addition, read Louis Pizzitola's book of 2002, *Hearst Over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies;* and go to the Internet for a copy (they can readily be had) of *Marion Davies,* the standard and still unsurpassed biography of 1972 by Fred Lawrence Guiles, despite its many errors (to be expected, given its age). Also, while in a seventies mode, lay hands on the Marion Davies memoir of 1975, *The Times We Had: Life with William Randolph Hearst.* The book is easily available in paperback. However, as we saw in the Introduction, read *The Times We Had* selectively, critically, poised always to apply a good-sized grain of salt; the book has never been revised, corrected, or expanded. Its time for such attention is long overdue.

Armed with those five books—six if you count this new one on "the Santa Monica connection"—you'll be well equipped to understand more about William Randolph Hearst and his circle than you ever bargained for. For the architecturally inclined, there's one more book: *Building for Hearst and Morgan: Voices from the George Loorz Papers,* by yours truly, Taylor Coffman. With those seven books, you can now know almost as much about Hearst, Miss Davies, and other fascinating characters as longtime devotees of Hearstiana do.

JOHN K. WINKLER, slated to be the author in 1928 of the earliest Hearst biography, *W. R. Hearst: An American Phenomenon,* published a series of magazine articles about the man in 1927. Winkler wrote on June 4 of that year to Arthur Brisbane, one of Hearst's foremost editors and confidants:

> I am doing a study in book form of Mr. Hearst for Simon & Schuster, similar in scope to a series of articles recently appearing in the *New Yorker.*
>
> The volume in no sense will purport to be a formal biography.

> Since you are very much a part of the Hearst picture, I wonder if I may call upon you for characteristic incidents and anecdotes?

On June 9, four days later in 1927, Brisbane ran Winkler's idea past Joe Willicombe, Hearst's secretary:

> Will you please find out from Mr. Hearst whether he approves of this idea to have Mr. Winkler write his life. I don't suppose he would do it without Mr. Hearst's consent, or at least publish it without Mr. Hearst's consent. I should think that if Mr. Hearst is going to have his life written, it ought to be done a good deal better than this man would probably do it, judging by his articles in the *New Yorker*.

Brisbane added a lengthy postscript to his letter:

> It is not that Mr. Winkler would not do his work well as far as it went, but it was extremely sketchy and I suppose some time or other there ought to be a semi-official life of Mr. Hearst that would really give an intelligent idea of what he has been driving at, and also of how he has accomplished the things that he has done.

The semi-official life Brisbane spoke of finally appeared in 1936, a book that every Hearst scholar has since been beholden to but at the same time has decried in some way, at times fiercely—Mrs. Fremont Older's *William Randolph Hearst: American*. The book was in fact one of three biographies of the man that appeared in 1936 (the two others were decidedly anti-Hearst). John Winkler, for his part, went forward in the late twenties with his biography of Hearst. By the end of the thirties decade he'd written comparable books about John D. Rockefeller, J. Pierpont Morgan, Woodrow Wilson, and the du Pont family. He wrote still more biographies in later years, most notably for our purposes *William Randolph Hearst: A New Appraisal*, published in 1955 and still helpful on various points alongside W. A. Swanberg and David Nasaw. In the meantime, between the late 1920s and the mid-1950s, Winkler was in Hearst's periodic employ. On the man's

seventy-eighth birthday in 1941, for example, Winkler offered these words:

> Deepest congratulations to a gallant gentleman, a generous employer and world journalism's outstanding genius. Long may he wave.

So Winkler was pro-Hearst after all. Hearst, for his part, could be more than just a generous employer: he could be generously forgiving, as we'll see at times in the pages to come. Nonetheless, Hearst was normally one to keep his unquestionable (and unquestioned) distance, a man who held his cards closely around most people, members of the Hearst-Davies inner circle being among the few exceptions. Swanberg's comment on Winkler's earlier portrayal of the Chief is worth quoting:

> In 1928 appeared the first biography of Hearst, a generally approving one written by John K. Winkler, a former reporter on the New York *American* [Hearst's main morning paper in that city]. Such was the public interest in the enigmatic publisher that the New York *Times* gave the book a front-page review in its Sunday literary section and it enjoyed a brisk sale. A friend recommended it to Hearst, but he shook his head. "If it doesn't tell the truth it will make me mad," he said, "and if it tells the truth it will make me sad."

Swanberg gleaned that rhyming line from a magazine article of 1930 in H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury* entitled "Hearst: A Psychological Note." The dichotomy of Hearst the knowable and unknowable, the accessible and inaccessible, the obvious and the mysterious is one that none of us will ever cease to grapple with. The builder George Loorz, whose name crops up several times ahead, was alluding to the Beach House of the 1927–28 period when he told a friend about Hearst:

> I worked for him under the roof where he lived for 8 months without meeting him. Though I received many orders in writing or thru another party from him.

Loorz was the construction superintendent on the Beach House job for nine months all told, so perhaps he met Hearst during his final weeks in Santa Monica. Those lines were written by Loorz in January 1934, on the eve of his second anniversary as construction superintendent on a much bigger, more demanding job—the one up the coast at San Simeon, where he'd since come to know Hearst quite well. "I like him very much," Loorz said of him in that same letter of 1934. "He has never been impatient with me in these two years of close contact":

> He encourages one to do all he can, not by haggling but by keeping keen interest in all that goes on and in openly expressing his appreciation. Except for that personal contact with him this job would be too isolated for me and I would leave right now.

Loorz put in another four years before he bade San Simeon adieu at the end of 1937, although he remained closely tied to Hearst and to Julia Morgan well into the 1940s.

"HEARST, THE MAN OF MYSTERY" appeared in *The American Magazine* in 1906, twenty years before work began in Santa Monica; the article was written by the famous muckraker Lincoln Steffens. It may as well have been written and published in 1926. Hearst was no less mysterious by then; in many ways he'd become more so, inevitably. The same needn't be said of Marion Davies, who was twenty-nine in 1926 to Hearst's sixty-three when the Beach House was launched. In being a film star, especially at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Marion led a life that was an open book, at least compared with Hearst's. *Photoplay* and other fan magazines didn't succeed in divulging *all* her secrets—mentions of Hearst were discreet and cautious, when they appeared at all—yet for general purposes, Marion was a known commodity, virtually public property. It wouldn't be long before it was widely known that she had a fabulous Georgian mansion

on the beach in Santa Monica and that she entertained grandly, thanks especially to photographs and stories that were made available to one and all, from idly curious people to the more devotedly starstruck.

What about Mrs. Hearst? Hearst was married all the while, wasn't he? Yes, he surely was—he had been since 1903—and he and Millicent had five sons to show for it, the oldest of them just seven years younger than Marion. An oft-asked question at San Simeon is, "Where was Mrs. Hearst when all this was going on?" The same could be asked of Santa Monica, provided Hearst is sufficiently restored to his rightful place in the scheme of things. The answer given at San Simeon is that the Hearsts were formally separated by the mid-1920s and remained apart until Hearst died in 1951, with Mrs. Hearst continuing to live as late as 1974 (Marion had died in 1961, a mere ten years after Hearst).

Fine and well, yet what follows is much more explanatory and penetrating, almost jarringly so even to San Simeon veterans who can rightly figure that they've seen and heard everything, either firsthand or by other means, Hearst Castle having been toured by the public since 1958. John F. Dunlap's long-gestating, self-published biography of Hearst, *The Hearst Saga: The Way It* Really *Was*, dates from 2002; its appearance coincided with the death of its author. The book contains a good deal of rare correspondence, most of it hitherto unknown. An extremely revealing letter is one that Hearst wrote longhand about 1931 to John Francis Neylan, a San Francisco attorney and personal adviser of his for many years. It's necessary to say "about 1931" because the item is undated. However, the letter's presence in the chapter devoted to 1931—this in a book that sticks closely to chronology—argues in favor of 1931 by simple context alone. The internal evidence points toward 1931 as well; 1930 is also a plausible date. In any event, Dunlap's publication of the Hearst letter is one of the highlights of the document-rich *Hearst Saga;* the letter began with Hearst's addressing John Francis Neylan as "Dear Jack":

I have made one of the most momentous decisions of my life and I have made it only after years of thought and worry over what was the best thing for me and Mrs. Hearst.

I have decided that our marriage contract should be dissolved for her welfare and happiness as well as mine.

We have not had marital relations for over ten years.

For the last year or so I have seen her only occasionally and whenever I do see her something that I do or say throws her into a fury which results in the most distressing scenes imaginable—distressing to both her and to me. . . .

I am not discussing whether Mrs. Hearst's tirades are justifiable or not. In any case they are unendurable to me and if they are justified the situation should be quite as unendurable to Mrs. Hearst.

The result of ten years of separation has been that we now have different tastes, different friends, and different interests.

The result of the many scenes is such that I really do not need Mrs. Hearst's injunction to stay away from her. I do not think I could muster up courage for another meeting.

Mrs. Hearst cabled you a year ago that she wanted a divorce. If she is still of the same mind she should proceed to get the divorce. If she does not do this I should go to Reno or Cuba or Mexico and get it. The only grounds on which I would secure a divorce in New York are grounds which are of course out of the question [adultery].

There seems to be nothing to be done except get a divorce.

The situation has not grown better in the ten years of our separation. It has grown steadily worse. In fact I have never in the whole ten years had a more painful experience than I had when I went East last time with the hope of spending some of the holiday season pleasantly with my children. The truth is we have drifted as far apart as the poles. In fact I imagine the situation is unendurable to Mrs. Hearst because the last time I was in New York Mrs. Hearst said she wanted me to go back to California and stay there, and gave me one week to quit New York or she would make a public scene. She also told my secretary that she never wanted to see me again.

As a matter of fact I was not only ordered out of the town but compelled to quit the house [at Sands Point, Long Island] I had just

> built [remodeled] and furnished in the hope of pleasing Mrs. Hearst and of securing some possible peace and contentment. Peace and contentment are entirely impossible for Mrs. Hearst or for me as long as we are together. . . .
>
> . . . I have provided for her [not only] in every way I thought was right but in every way that Mrs. Hearst has requested.
>
> Two agreements have been executed, the second to add to her provision everything which she had not required in the first one. I want her to be happy and in the matter of the divorce I believe that I have Mrs. Hearst's happiness and welfare practically as much at heart as my own.

Dunlap remarked by saying, "This painful situation was doomed only to further deterioration." He said in addition about Hearst:

> Upon returning from a later trip east, the publisher again wrote Neylan [with] a second "Dear Jack" letter, saying that he was tired of being embarrassed by Millicent whenever he was in New York and giving the attorney firm instructions promptly to file for the divorce.

Since Hearst is known not to have been in New York between October 1931 and May 1934, that two-and-a-half year stretch when he went no farther east than Ohio in 1932 can be placed like a bookend on the right side of these events. The harder question is where the left bookend should go. He stopped in New York briefly in May 1931 before sailing to Europe with Marion and a group of friends. That period posed the latest time he could have written to Neylan as he did in the first letter that John Dunlap quoted, there having been one more layover for Hearst to make in New York (the one in October 1931) upon returning from abroad and heading back to California.

In fairness to Millicent Hearst, Elsa Maxwell, described as "an arbiter of international society and one of the world's most famous hostesses," should be quoted—this from her memoir of 1954 entitled *R.S.V.P: Elsa Maxwell's Own Story:*

> Soon after America entered World War I [in 1917], I made another lifelong friend. . . . She was Mrs. William Randolph Hearst, the wife of the most controversial and shrewdest publisher in the history of American journalism. Although Mrs. Hearst was as active as I in war work, we never met until she dropped me a note asking me to help her on a project. . . .
>
> I arrived at the appointed time, and seated at her desk was the prettiest creature I had ever seen. It was difficult to believe she was the mother of five sons. I introduced myself and heard for the first time that famous chuckle that has charmed her world.
>
> Soon after I met Millicent Hearst, a cloud appeared that cast a pall over her entire life. Her husband became involved romantically with Marion Davies, a movie star of the period. When she learned the bitter truth, Millicent refused to give her husband a divorce. For thirty years [1921 to 1951] she suffered humiliation in a desperate effort to maintain a semblance of family unity for the sake of her five sons. . . .
>
> Millicent could have found happiness with another husband. A number of men were attracted by her beauty, charm and keen mind, which had been sharpened by meeting the world's leading statesmen and intellectuals in her home. Among many other things, Millicent is a superb hostess. . . .
>
> If Millicent had been impressed by false glitter, she could have had her pick of several high European titles, had she been willing to divorce her husband. . . .
>
> During Millicent's long domestic troubles, I marveled at her strength and wondered how she could be so free from the weaknesses associated with the eternal feminine. She held her head high, never tried to enlist sympathy or complained of her lot.

If ever there were two conflicting sides to a story, this situation involving the Hearsts and Marion Davies had to be it. Marion put things in perspective in 1951/1975 while reminiscing of herself and Hearst, "We were together, and that was all that mattered." Further on in *The Times We Had*, she said this of their ironclad arrangement:

> Why should I run after a streetcar when I was already aboard?

WITH THE HEARSTS' MARRIAGE put in fuller perspective, what else needs clarifying before we plunge into the events of 1926? How about a bit more on the all but common-law marriage of Hearst and Marion? Surely one of the leading fallacies about the Beach House is that Hearst was often at San Simeon or somewhere else while Marion was in Santa Monica. Not true, with the rarest exceptions. From 1931 to 1951—the former being the probable date of his letters about a divorce and also the date of Santa Monica's initial completion—he and Marion were seldom apart. Their de facto marriage, their virtually uninterrupted union, lasted a full twenty years. Much of the same can be said for the years from the mid-1920s to 1931 (this excludes the furtive, closeted years from as far back as the mid-1910s). Overall, Hearst and Marion's times apart from, say, 1925 through 1930, a period when he still saw his wife, no matter how briefly or awkwardly, paled in duration next to the unbroken stretches that prevailed for the unwed Hearst-Davies couple from 1931 onward.

Measuring by sixteen years from the beginning of 1931 to the end of 1946, when Hearst and Marion offered the Beach House for sale, their whereabouts were approximately as follows. They spent 40% of that period—piecemeal, of course—at San Simeon. They spent 30% of their time at Wyntoon in Northern California, the great majority of it in the second half of that same sixteen-year stretch. They were in Santa Monica 20% of the time, heavily slanted toward the first half of that period. This leaves 10% of the span from 1931 to 1946 to be divided between New York, Europe, and other places besides California.

These figures further reveal that the first half of those years—the eight years from 1931 through 1938—saw Hearst and Marion allotting San Simeon about 45% of their time; Santa Monica 25%; New York, Europe, and other places out of state 20%; and Wyntoon a mere 10%. The second half of the sixteen-year period, 1939 through 1946, yields

very different figures: Wyntoon nearly 50%, San Simeon about 35%, Santa Monica 12%, various other places just 3%.

All these figures need refining. The percentages above are indicative, though, of distinct trends and patterns, of habits and movements on Hearst and Marion's part that become more familiar with every batch of documents one sees from those years. The main point isn't whether a given percentage needs adjusting upward or downward but rather to note that whether he and she were at San Simeon, Wyntoon, or in Santa Monica, they were usually in the same place at the same time.

To cite round figures once more, Hearst and Marion spent a quarter of their time in Santa Monica through the 1931–1938 period but only half as much time—a trifling one eighth—through the 1939–1946 period. In their protracted absences, the Beach House obviously was no place to leave abandoned, any more than San Simeon was during its long stretches of non-use, especially in the early 1940s. But except for a brief stay like the one that Joseph P. Kennedy and his son John enjoyed in Santa Monica late in 1940, little else warrants our attention without Hearst and Marion on the immediate scene.

WARRANTED OR NOT, let's turn our attention toward clues and snippets and fragments of information about the Beach House as handily as we can. Why? Because there's often so little else to go on. The main building was razed more than half a century now, leaving the perfect environment for myths and misconceptions to colonize, like weeds on a vacant lot. And of course the film *Citizen Kane* of 1941 has proved to be a legacy more enduring than any weed could ever be. It may indeed deserve its reputation as the greatest moment in modern cinema; we needn't argue that point pro or con. However, to judge San Simeon or Wyntoon or the Beach House—or Hearst and Marion—by

Kane's standards is the wrong way to go. There's been enough of that in criticism both profound and merely off the cuff.

Another product of 1941 is far more suited to the task at hand, that of understanding Hearst first and foremost and, as much as possible in conjunction with him, Marion—and along with them the buildings in their lives. In Leo Rosten's *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers,* published in 1941, the author included a chapter on things architectural, entitled "Of Marble Halls." Naturally, the young but keenly astute Rosten, writing the book in the late Depression years, was almost duty bound to be somewhat condescending and condemnatory, yet his premise was restrained for a work of that period:

> In Hollywood, as in Istanbul or Sioux Falls, the rich hasten to express their wealth, and betray their fitful groping for status, by erecting homes of unnecessary magnitude and splendor. For wealth is a psychological sovereignty, and those within its boundaries live in obligatory palaces. Houses are the most visible and enduring signs of great fortune; in all times and places architecture has served as a primary symbol of social station. The landscape of America, from Baton Rouge to St. Paul, from Baltimore to Hollywood, is dotted with the proud mansions of social ambition. . . .
>
> Hollywood offers no palaces and no furnishings to match those of the Eastern nabobs, but the first batch of movie *arrivistes* made a partial effort to imitate their peers. They built big mansions, fine gardens, and filled their chalets with costly paraphernalia. The hills above Sunset Boulevard, from Hollywood to the Pacific Palisades, glisten with estates which try to ape the elegance of Long Island or the Riviera. Here are wooded acres, splendiferous homesteads, rambling gardens, terraces, fountains, tennis courts, and all the accessories of wealth and fame. Here, and in Bel-Air and Holmby Hills, are the homes of Hollywood's elite; here is the movie fan's Valhalla. . . .
>
> Probably the most imposing dwellings in the film colony are those of Harold Lloyd, Cecil B. DeMille, Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin, Marion

> Davies, Winfield Sheehan, and the late Carl Laemmle. The Lloyd estate, an awe-inspiring demesne [domain or estate], is reported to be the most expensive. This architectural *tour de force* . . . cost well over $1,000,000. . . .
>
> The DeMille manor house tops a hill in Los Feliz, overlooking fine lawns, a little park and lagoon, and superb flower beds. "Pickfair," once renowned as the home of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford [divorced in 1936], is a massive gray pile high up in the hills, set back on ample acreage, with great walls and gates, fine *ameublements* [furnishings], swimming pool, and gardens.
>
> The three-story colonial manse of Marion Davies on the sands of Santa Monica overwhelms the eye: its foyer is spectacular, its furnishing lavish, and rooms disemboweled from European castles stand in cool magnificence. The woodwork and chandeliers are worthy of museums; there are van loads of *objets d'art,* innumerable paintings (including a good many of the mistress of the house), and around ninety rooms—most of which, it is said, have telephones connected to the private switchboard. This dovecote contains a long, marble pool (fifty yards from the plebian Pacific) with a marble bridge bisecting it, à la the Rialto [on the Grand Canal in Venice].

It is said, it is said. Even a writer of Rosten's diligence had to rely on hearsay—that along with his own imagination and what credible facts he could dig up by any historical means, fair or foul. His chapter "Of Marble Halls" would not soon be surpassed. He was right when he said the following:

> The maintenance costs for these homesteads is, of course, staggering, and the movie people, like the captains of industry, have learned the meaning of the adage that it isn't the cost but the upkeep. "A man builds a fine house," wrote [Ralph Waldo] Emerson, "and now he has a master, and a task for life; he is to furnish, watch, show it, and keep it in repair for the rest of his days." . . .
>
> These names—Lloyd, DeMille, Chaplin, Pickford, Davies, Barrymore, Laemmle, Sheehan, Valentino, Zukor—are themselves suggestive of Hollywood's past; they are associated with the first era of

> the movie colony; and the edifices which we have described were built from fifteen to twenty-five years ago [from 1916 to 1926].

Rosten spoke of the "naïve and flamboyant urges which went into these monuments" of the early period; then he came to his main paragraph, one between whose lines the Beach House can surely be placed, even beyond the accord that Rosten gave it:

> It is important to recognize the influence of William Randolph Hearst on the movie pioneers. The amazing publisher entered the movie field via newsreels around 1911. Attracted to movies as a hobby, and because they promised profits, his amateur interest turned into professional activity as a means of furthering the dramatic career of Marion Davies. Miss Davies' Santa Monica retreat (the size and furnishings of which show the Hearst touch) became a meeting place for Hollywood and Hearst. The power of the Hearst press, the Hearst magazines, the Hearst radio stations, the Hearst columnists, and the Hearst feature writers insured the aging publisher a welcome in the movie colony. He bought stock in MGM, which released the Hearst *Movietone* [or rather *Metrotone*] newsreels, organized Cosmopolitan Pictures to produce Miss Davies' films, and made deals for the distribution of the pictures, first with MGM and then with Warner Brothers. Hearst's activities in the Republican party and in California politics brought him closer to the leaders of the movie industry, notably the Messrs. [Louis B.] Mayer and [Nicholas] Schenck. Hearst's Hollywood correspondent, Louella Parsons, became a plenipotentiary whom no one dared offend. With the years, Mr. Hearst became genuinely attached to the gay, bright picture people and the Hollywood in which they held court.

Despite some inevitable errors in the foregoing, Rosten's paragraph holds up almost seventy years later. He seemed unaware of Hearst's stature in the Democratic Party, as recently as the 1932 election. Yet this and other breaches needn't sink the ship. Rosten understood Hearst better than nearly anyone who'd written about him before 1941—ironically, the saccharine but attuned Mrs. Fremont Older of 1936 would be one of the few exceptions—and to have gained the

insight he had at such a young age (he was born in 1908, Mrs. Older in 1875) is more than doubly remarkable.

Rosten had further things to say about Hearst, vis-à-vis Hollywood and its unique culture; the Beach House can once again be prominently placed between the lines:

> Hearst opened the portals of San Simeon to the movie crowd, and he dazzled their eyes with the magniloquence of his life and the princely abandon of his expenditure. His baronial castle on the Pacific was a cross between the Palazzo Uffizi [in Florence, Italy] and the Hippodrome [in ancient Constantinople]. . . .
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> The movie parvenus—pretty actresses, ambitious actors, culture-hungry producers—were understandably awed by a man who bestrode an empire of his own making, a man who owned yachts, woods, zoos, lakes, mines, a castle in Wales, and—at San Simeon alone—thirty-five cars! . . .
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> It was Hearst who held the banner of luxury before the early movie magnates. He possessed vast wealth, a Renaissance flair for spending, and an appreciation of the arts. He also bore a name that commanded respect. He was the son of a Senator; he had been a Congressman; he had run for Governor of New York. He consorted with kings, ministers, [and] princes of the church. In William Randolph Hearst, imperial and grandiose, the emerging elite of Hollywood found a modern Croesus. They could scarcely have remained unaffected by his example.

Nor could they ignore the example of Miss Davies, chatelaine like no other, at least not in this country during its first 165 years as the United States of America that Hearst so revered. As the duet they long were, he and Marion proved an impossible act to follow. That's still true today.