2

Ladies First

1925–1928

WHEN WORK BEGAN on the Beach House in 1926 for Hearst and Marion, it did so under William Flannery, who was only twenty-seven. At fifty-four, Julia Morgan was twice his age, easily old enough to be his mother. Yes, but wasn't she out of the picture for the most part? Wasn't she serving Hearst's interests at San Simeon and in the Bay Area, her home turf? And wasn't she also consumed with her other clients' needs on a wide range of jobs, large and small?

The evidence, despite its frequent spottiness, has cast a different light on certain notions that, without the Big Three archives in the early Santa Monica game—The Bancroft, Cal Poly, and Morgan-Forney—would be nothing but vague ideas or assumptions destined to hold sway in perpetuity, far beyond our time.

For instance, it's impossible to believe now that Morgan didn't know closely what Hearst was up to with his new project in Santa Monica. The cover sheet of a job ledger she began in the preceding year, 1925, is headed "Miss Marion Davies." Its back side says "Beverly Hills W.R.H." This pertained not to Santa Monica but to the remodeling of 1700 Lexington Road, a house originally designed by William Flannery that Hearst had bought for Marion and her family members in the coming-out year of 1924. Unlike the level Beach House site, the place on Lexington quietly commanded (and still does) a low, gentle rise, a perfect spot with a climate to match, just a few hundred yards northwest of the Beverly Hills Hotel. The Lexington place had been dressed in the stodgy Tudor half-timbering seen on several

Beverly Hills houses of the day. It was surely ripe for a Hearstian facelift, despite its youth. The contract went to the original builders, Charles and Frank Carpenter (Carpenter Bros., Inc.), offshoots of a local development firm and, to hear Hearst or Morgan tell it, eventual pair of thieves. Carpenter Bros. would soon get the nod on the Beach House as well.

Work began on 1700 Lexington with Morgan making two trips to the site in late September 1925. The first of them—on Friday the 18th—was an extension of her latest stop at San Simeon and at the Margaret Baylor Inn in Santa Barbara (today's Lobero Building on Anacapa Street), a YWCA job of hers in recent years. While in the Los Angeles area, she also stopped at the Hollywood Studio Club, another recent YWCA project (whose building committee included Mrs. Cecil B. DeMille, a personal friend of hers). The Morgan-Forney ledgers contain such details minutely. Any such trip that involved multiple stops on the same day or successive days led to Morgan's "Travel" costs being apportioned: so much to Santa Barbara, so much to Beverly Hills, so much to Hollywood. The upshot is that *all* her ledgers for the region have to be closely checked and collated, the Long Beach YWCA being still another prospect for 1925.

Morgan was back in Santa Barbara a week and a half later, on September 28—a Monday this time. She was there for the sake of the Margaret Baylor Inn and for that of a much lesser-known job, the graceful Santa Barbara Hospital near Goleta. She stopped at 1700 Lexington in Beverly Hills on that same day in 1925 and again at the Hollywood Studio Club. However, her ledgers show that San Simeon wasn't part of her current itinerary. She next appeared there on Monday, October 5.

In Beverly Hills, meanwhile, Morgan's presence or that of a proxy was required there as soon as Friday, October 2, just four days after her latest stop. Thaddeus Joy, her top draftsman in San Francisco and one

of her office partners, made the needed trip. Joy reappeared solo in Beverly Hills late on October 15, for the sake of the 16th. Hearst had wired Morgan within the past twenty-four hours. “I will be in Los Angeles tomorrow Thursday and Friday [the 15th and 16th],” he said. “Suggest Mr. Joy come down Thursday night and see me Friday.” His suggestion was promptly heeded.

Two months passed with no further ledger entries being made for travel in 1925—not until December 15 (Thad Joy again) and December 31 (Morgan herself, as part of a trip to San Simeon, Santa Barbara, Hollywood, and Long Beach).

THE SURVIVING CORRESPONDENCE between Hearst and Morgan is silent on Santa Monica for the final months of 1925. It seems the safest of assumptions, though, to think that 415 Ocean Front or the Beach House or whatever name it first went by would crop up in conversation, if not in documentation yet to be found.

For the sake of perspective, let’s note that Hearst had commissioned two projects in Los Angeles a while earlier in the 1920s that Morgan had taken little part in, or even no part. First there’d been his Los Angeles Herald Building on South Trenton Street, razed in the 1970s—and not to be confused with the Examiner Building on South Broadway that was renamed the Herald-Examiner Building in 1962, when Hearst’s morning and evening papers merged. The Herald Building’s forgotten footprint, half a mile west of the older and better-known Examiner Building, gets a full-court press nowadays from the L.A. Lakers at Staples Center. No architect in the early twenties named Julia Morgan had been on the Herald job, which was sizable. Never mind the subsequent, gratuitous crediting to her of that bygone building. Her records are too complete from January 1924 onward for the later phases of any such project to have gone unrecorded by her

office. (There's some chance, however, that for the entire period before the mid-1940s, Hearst leased rather than owned the Herald Building.)

Nor did Julia Morgan play a discernible role in putting up the Cosmopolitan Bungalow about 1925 at MGM in Culver City, the famous "dressing room" of Marion Davies. In reality, the Bungalow was something more serious, albeit a wood frame and stucco structure rather than an essay in poured concrete: namely, the West Coast headquarters of Hearst's International Film Service. The ethereal New York designer Joseph Urban did the honors instead; and it became another Hearst project erroneously identified for many years with Morgan. She later worked on the Bungalow, to be sure, but not until 1933 and 1934. That's when Hearst added a projection room, only to uproot the whole ensemble soon afterward and move it bodily to Warner Bros. in Burbank.

In each of these instances before the Beach House launch in 1926—one on the edge of downtown Los Angeles, the other out in Culver City—Morgan can readily be seen as having been too busy, too heavily booked to do a smidgen more than what Hearst had already assigned her. Even the quickest glance at Appendix I, her "Distribution of Expenses" sheets for 1924–1940, shows that she was inordinately spoken for, if not downright harried in 1926. San Simeon alone was a handful, at times a major headache. And now, starting late in 1925, there was 1700 Lexington Road in Beverly Hills; and by June 1926 the job in Santa Monica, a job that would only get bigger. ("Just like you build with little blocks," as Marion said of Hearst and the Beach House in *The Times We Had*, "he added on and on.")

A long letter that Morgan sent Hearst on December 9, 1925, three weeks before her New Year's trip to San Simeon, began with "Mr. Joy has some developed sketches for you, when you want them and him." The context favors Beverly Hills, for she referred to San Simeon

separately and at greater length in succeeding paragraphs. Then she had this to report:

> Myself will be on the High Seas Christmas on way home from Honolulu where to I set sail today. This was why I went to San Simeon Sunday [December 6], checking up to see that every one understood what he had to do. It was a heavenly day.

Morgan was alluding to the Honolulu YWCA, one of her biggest jobs during the twenties decade. If she stayed on schedule and was indeed sailing back to California on Friday the 25th, she wouldn't have known yet that Hearst was thinking of her and their mutual pursuits. He dictated a letter to her on that Christmas Day itself through his wizard of a secretary, Joe Willicombe; it was sent from San Simeon the next day, presumably—a Saturday. Hearst's unfestive words would thus have awaited Morgan at her office in San Francisco. He began on this note:

> I think that if we had a little more system in the proceedings on the ranch [San Simeon], we would get more efficiency and more progress. As it is, things take so long to finish that I am losing interest in the ranch.

How best to take this? Was Hearst simply being an ingrate, a crank, a holiday scrooge? Frankly, there are so many passages like this in his business correspondence that we can safely ignore it. Hearst the driver, the desk pounder, the restless builder of castles and still more, was given to such venting almost daily. Not to worry, though, or to look greatly askance; he found ways to be humorous and charming, too, likewise before the day was done. Much of this tut-tutting was simply *business.* Miss Morgan was someone who knew how to take what Hearst decreed, knew how to keep it all in manageable perspective. She'd have quit or been fired long before if she hadn't.

The part, though, about his "losing interest in the ranch" does indeed pack some extra punch. Taken at simple face value, does it

mean he was itching for a new venture—perhaps the Beach House in Santa Monica? It surely gives pause. And invites speculation.

FROM JANUARY TO JUNE 1926, Morgan's job ledgers provide stepping stones, some with regard to Beverly Hills but none yet for the sake of Santa Monica. The woman made a San Simeon-Hollywood-Beverly Hills junket in the third week of January. Thad Joy flanked her trips that month with two of his own. Morgan racked up similar credits in February whereas Joy did not. Neither of them was in Beverly Hills in March, April, or May 1926; however, Morgan appeared in Santa Barbara and Hollywood. Finally, starting in mid-June that year, a new ledger came into play: "William Randolph Hearst, Beach House, Santa Monica, Cal." Penciled above its first group of entries was this note: "5% for working drawings & what help needed." The "help" portion meant William Flannery, not Carpenter Bros., the general contractors. In being set at 5%, Morgan's commission would be a shade less than the industry standard of 6% and substantially less than the 8.5% Hearst paid her for most of the work at San Simeon, a unique job whose remoteness and high operating costs demanded the extra amount.

It surely bears mentioning—though this point must also be taken at face value, with few besides Fred Guiles having seen the private Marion Davies Collection before its fragmentation—that in recounting the first visit by Hearst and Davies to the prospective Beach House site, Guiles alluded to the week in May 1926 that ended on Saturday the 22nd. He did so by saying, "Earlier that week, evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson had gone swimming nearby and had vanished." Sister Aimee's charade is well documented. Her purported drowning, which proved specious, occurred on Tuesday, May 18. Half a page later, Guiles added that "The beach house was begun later that year . . . under the overall supervision of William Flannery." He included a brief

description of such things as “37 fireplaces, some 250 years old.” We can put that thought on hold for now. Despite the superb thirty-page appendix Guiles included on “The Films of Marion Davies,” he left us with a main text of nearly 375 pages unsupported by notes of any kind.

All the same, Julia Morgan’s trips to greater Los Angeles during June 1926 and through the rest of the summer were sometimes Beverly Hills-Santa Monica combinations, predictably enough. Yet they increasingly came to favor Santa Monica, with 1700 Lexington sharply on the wane now, with or without any Santa Barbara or Hollywood tie-ins. Following her first stop in Santa Monica in June (she was there just once that month, on Saturday or Sunday the 12th or 13th), Hearst wrote to her in San Francisco from Los Angeles. It was now June 22. She in turn wrote to him the next day, Wednesday the 23rd, at the Ambassador Hotel:

> The blue prints of the Beach House are not of course a complete set of plans, but should enable the builders to go ahead without doing over [redoing] main framing to accommodate chimneys, hearths, pipes trusses, etc. on upper floors.
>
> You may not like the roof or other details of treatment, but they are easily changed. We will go right on completing [them] and in a few days, would like to go over the whole set with you—or could send Mr. Joy if preferred.

Hearst must have preferred Morgan for the time being. For she represented her San Francisco office exclusively in July (four stops altogether in Santa Monica), likewise in August (two more stops), and again in September (another two). In the midst of these travels, she sent further word to Hearst on Wednesday, September 1:

> After leaving you last night [at San Simeon], Mr. Rossi [Camille Rossi, George Loorz’s predecessor from 1922 to 1932 as head of construction] asked me if there was anything more for Mr. Serberoli [Hector Serbaroli], the man who finished out the ceiling of the Hall [the

> Assembly Room], the Doges Suite bedrooms, and vestibule frieze,—to do. There is not at present so I let him go.
>
> Coming down [the hilltop] it occur[r]ed to me that perhaps he would be just the man, if you wanted some of those freely rendered wall frescoes for the Beach House. His pay by the day is very reasonable for the work he does.

A key passage, this one from 1926. It's a shred of evidence that may touch on how some of Santa Monica's rooms were decorated. Hector Serbaroli, a muralist in the San Francisco Bay Area, also plied his trade in the film industry. And yet whether Morgan's reference to him indicates a trend of any lasting or profound kind in the Santa Monica annals is hard to say. As a rule, latter-day attempts to connect her more prominent artisans (mostly Bay Area stalwarts like Jules Suppo, of San Simeon fame) with the work in Santa Monica haven't been productive.

In using a passage by Louella Parsons about the Beach House at this juncture, the editors of Marion's memoir cited the date September 9, 1926; the following by Miss Parsons appeared in the *Los Angeles Examiner* and other newspapers that carried her column:

> Marion Davies will soon move into her beach house at Santa Monica. It is the largest house on any southern California beach. While being shown around, I counted fifteen bathrooms, and even Marion doesn't know how many other rooms there are. When she tires of it [the house], she plans to convert it into a beach club.

As for a move-in date, the following April would be soon enough; it was early that month in 1927 that Hearst told Flannery, "Miss Davies moves in on the 15th." Yet she could only have done so under makeshift conditions, there being a great deal of work still awaiting completion or, for that matter, still inhabiting Hearst's mind or Morgan's drafting boards.

Back to 1926 for now. On Monday, October 11, of that first year in Santa Monica, Morgan had more to tell Hearst, who had recently gone to New York:

> At the Beach House work was going well [she'd been there on Thursday the 7th]—the pool still tight [its gunite coating holding well]. Will Dutch tile (blue and white) be satisfactory for the kitchen, pantries, etc. between counter shelves and cupboards? Most wall surfaces are covered by [display] cases to ceiling.

Yes, Hearst replied a week later, the Dutch tiles she described would be suitable. What he hadn't heard yet, didn't know yet, is that between her message of the 11th and his of the 18th, she'd been stopped cold in her tracks. Thad Joy gave the details on October 23, 1926, writing to Hearst in New York, where he was still holed up that fall:

> On October 15th Miss Morgan was stricken with a serious intestinal illness which necessitated an immediate operation. She was in a dangerous condition until yesterday, but she is now able to take food and her physician reports that her condition has turned toward recovery.
>
> She will be confined for several weeks.
>
> Yesterday she showed her renewed interest in life by asking if any damage had been done by the earthquake at San Simeon.

Hearst also learned that Joy would "be at San Simeon on the 27th" and that a progress report was imminent. Joy also said, by way of closing:

> Mr. Nusbaum visited the Santa Monica job last Monday [October 18].

Morgan's Beach House ledger confirms that her draftsman Lazer Nusbaum (or Dick, as he was better known, an architect in his own right) had gone south on Saturday, October 16. Otherwise, Thad Joy was the point man through the latter part of 1926. It was he who kept

abreast of Santa Monica. He stopped there five times between October 31 and the end of the year.

While Hearst was still in New York, a letter dated October 18 went his way from Carpenter Bros., the builders on both the Marion Davies job in Beverly Hills and the more recent one in Santa Monica. Alas, an all too familiar story. Hearst's arrears were almost $5,300 on the older job and as much as $14,000 on the newer one. (The combined $19,300 equates with nearly a quarter million dollars in today's economy.) The contractor's grievance aside, the best part of this episode is what it tells us about Santa Monica early in the game. Namely, from the outset, the Beach House was a substantially larger venture than the overlapping efforts on Lexington Road had ever been.

CERTAIN OTHER EVENTS in October 1926 contributed to an unusually appealing memoir, written a dozen years later. Alice Head—well named for her demure, evenhanded ways—oversaw Hearst's National Magazine Company in London, publishers of his English editions of *Good Housekeeping* and *Harper's Bazaar* plus other monthly titles. Miss Head (shades of "Miss Morgan") had been instrumental in Hearst's purchase of St. Donat's Castle in Wales in 1925. In late September of the following year, she sailed to America on the *Aquitania* at Hearst's indulgent behest; the ship docked in New York while he was in town, as mentioned a moment ago. The details that Alice Head recalled—her autobiography, *It Could Never Have Happened*, appeared in England in 1939—are exact one moment, less so the next, yet still trustworthy overall. Few if any other "Hearstlings" as highly placed as she was have discreetly told as much. She started west to see California for the first time on October 7, 1926, again through Hearst's arrangements; these included a side trip to the Grand Canyon with Joe Willicombe as her guide; Hearst had had mining and grazing acreage on the South Rim near Grandview Point since 1913.

Although Miss Head portrayed Hearst as having also gone to California at this juncture in 1926, he tarried in the East instead, as the Hearst-Morgan correspondence and other documents show. No matter. For our purposes, Miss Head was nearly perfect in all else that she said, leaving us with words to be savored:

> On arrival in Los Angeles we drove straight to the Ambassador Hotel, surely one of the most thrilling hotels in the world, especially to a newcomer to California. The blazing sunshine, the gardens with their brilliant oleanders, bougainvilleas, camellias and poinsettias, the parrots and cockatoos, and the vivid blue bathing pool provide an entrancing outlook for the guests at this delightful caravanserai. With its range of shops inside the building, its post-office and cable office, its cinema, its theatre and lecture hall, its beauty parlour, coffee shops and snack-bars as well as its famous restaurant and Cocoanut Grove, one can be completely entertained and interested without even going outside the place. . . .
>
> The first time I went downstairs to the cable office to send a radio[gram] to my secretary, the girl in charge read the message through including my signature "Head" and then burst out excitedly: "You're not the Alice Head of London, England, are you?" I said: "That is my maiden name," and thought to myself, this is fame indeed.

Hearst had a room at the Ambassador, or perhaps a suite of rooms—"an entire floor," as one of his freer biographers, John Tebbel, said in 1952. The hotel was Hearst's official Los Angeles address from the mid-1920s until the early 1930s. Virtually nothing is known, though, about decorative or architectural touches that he *must* have ordered in that setting. Miss Morgan's detailed records contain nothing about it.

As for Alice Head, she had more to say about events that fall, three years to the month before the great Wall Street Crash:

> The first night in Los Angeles was made memorable for me by an invitation to dine with Miss Marion Davies at her house in Beverly Hills

> [on Lexington Road]. I would like to write many pages about Marion—in fact I think she deserves a book all to herself. . . . Marion is that rara avis, a genuinely unselfish person. She will give the clothes off her back to anyone she thinks needs them, and has to be forcibly restrained from distributing most of her possessions. Her wit and gaiety have the same bubbling quality as champagne. . . .
>
> . . . I was told that a car would be awaiting me at seven o'clock to drive me to Beverly Hills. I did not know what to wear. . . . Frightened was not the word for it when I stepped into a roomful of film stars at Marion's house, and my panic increased when after dinner we played such games as making an impromptu two-minute speech on a subject pulled at random out of a hat. But Marion's kindness and simplicity of manner soon put me at my ease and I had a memorable evening. The other guests included Charlie Chaplin (who did his famous imitation of a bull-fight), Bebe Daniels, Norma Talmadge, Jack Pickford, Mr. and Mrs. Sam Goldwyn, Elinor Glyn and Viscount Elmley [William Lygon]. The next day I was taken to Cecil de Mille's studio [DeMille Pictures in Culver City], where King of Kings was being produced [August 1926 through January 1927], and then followed two or three most exciting days in Los Angeles and Hollywood. I met innumerable film stars and received much kindness from all the studios.

A small atrium job by Julia Morgan for DeMille's wife, Constance, had been started in May 1926 and would end in December. Morgan had stopped at the DeMille's hillside home in Laughlin Park, an East Hollywood-Los Feliz neighborhood, in late September. Thad Joy would do so in early November, right after Alice Head's own visit to the greater area. That demure Englishwoman also went briefly to Tijuana and Coronado and then—for her "next adventure"—to San Simeon, where she spent two weeks, all within October 1926. But no word thus far of Santa Monica and its grand Beach House. Nor would there be any mention by Miss Head until she appeared again in California.

THADDEUS JOY had been right in saying on October 23 that Julia Morgan's recovery would take time. She'd been in the hospital in San Francisco for nearly a month now. Hearst learned on November 17 that she'd be going home the next day. Good news. The other part was discouraging: her doctor advised that she "not resume work" until the first of 1927. The relentless Hearst had his much softer side, of course, typified by the wire he sent Morgan on December 21, 1926, yet another month later:

> Glad to hear you are better. Please don't attempt too much too soon. Remember your reserve vitality has been exhausted and you must rest and let reserve accumulate. You should organize your office and do less detail yourself.

She already was doing less herself, witness Thad Joy's recent travels. That wouldn't prevail for long. In January 1927 she resumed her pattern of fairly regular trips to San Simeon. She combined these over the next few months with stops at the Margaret Baylor Inn (and once in April at the adjoining Santa Barbara Gym). As for Santa Monica, though, neither she nor Joy nor anyone else from her office appeared there again until July.

Before committing ourselves fully to 1927, one of Hollywood's many film-star memoirs begs to be heard. It may as well be now, for Raoul Walsh's first wife, the silent actress Miriam Cooper, was about to become his ex-wife; the courts made it final in 1927, and Walsh went on to marry Lorraine Walker in 1928, a ceremony held at Agua Caliente in Tijuana (a raucous setting that Alice Head may well have avoided). Raoul and Lorraine Walsh became intimate members of the Hearst-Davies circle—in the 1930s and 1940s, that is. Yet to hear Miss Cooper tell it, things had been different in the twenties:

> It amazed me how this girl [Marion] could fool so successful a man [Hearst]. He had fallen in love with her when she had appeared in the Ziegfeld Follies chorus [in 1916]. The house he built for her, San

> Simeon, was a three-story mansion with a marble swimming pool and about ninety rooms, all lavishly furnished with art objects and priceless paintings.
>
> He also built a beach house for her, just five houses from us [on Ocean Front]. We all had reasonably large houses, but when hers was going up it was so big we thought it was the new club. Mr. Hearst would come bicycling past our house and give us a big wave, and Marion would invite us to her parties. We didn't go; Raoul wouldn't let me enter a kept woman's house.

The Cooper memoir appeared in 1973, published by the same Bobbs-Merrill Company that would strike pay dirt in 1975 with *The Times We Had,* based on the tapes made by Marion in 1951. Miss Cooper's very first words in her book were revealing—provided they were trustworthy: "Most little old ladies I know who are pushing eighty sit in front of TV sets in nursing homes. Not me. At the age of seventy-eight I started having a ball." She also began writing, with Bonnie Herndon's help, a book with biblical overtones. That at least is how her *Dark Lady of the Silents: My Life in Early Hollywood* has been taken regarding Hearst, Marion, and the Beach House. True, we're talking about the early 1970s. It was before PCs, before the Internet, before Google. It was also almost half a century after Walsh's second marriage in 1928 in Tijuana helped elevate him to Hearst-Davies inner-circle status—whereupon he not only entered more than one house of a notorious kept woman, he returned the favor as often as his and his new wife's yen for race horses allowed. He was still repaying his lavish hosts in 1942. That's when Raoul and Lorraine Walsh tagged along with Hearst and Marion to Mexico (as they also had in 1941), going hundreds of miles deeper into that country than a border town like Tijuana could ever offer. No, they went again with the Hearst party to Mexico City in 1942, the Paris of the Western Hemisphere in that wartime era, a year to the month after Pearl Harbor. The Walshes saw Acapulco, too, on that later trip; and Guadalajara, Oaxaca and, of

course, the huge Hearst ranch in Chihuahau, Sonora, called the Babicora. And yet when historical context gets warped as excessively as Miriam Cooper rendered it, almost no amount of reason will realign it. Alas, Raoul Walsh was himself a poor memoirist. At least his book of 1974, *Each Man in His Time,* kept the self-righteousness about two of his very best, most devoted friends—Hearst and Marion—within saner bounds than the Cooper book had the year before.

UNLIKE RAOUL WALSH, famous as a director—a grizzled precursor with his eye patch to head-banded Sam Peckinpah—William Flannery is best known in old film circles as an art director. Nonetheless, a quick check of today's IMDb website indicates he had no screen credits allotted him until Paramount Pictures made *Forlorn River* in 1937, a western starring Buster Crabbe. Flannery shared the credit with a fellow art director, as he also did on his next film, Paramount's *Sons of the Legion* in 1938. And so on for another film in 1938, no fewer than seven in 1939, and four in 1940. Fifteen years later and with at least as many more films to his credit, he worked on *Picnic,* a Columbia Pictures drama starring William Holden and Kim Novak. Flannery and two others won the 1955 Academy Award for art direction-set decoration—the high point for him in a career that ended with *The Crimson Kimono* in 1959, the year of his death. He was only sixty.

Long before that part of Flannery's life, eleven years lay between groundbreaking in Santa Monica in 1926 and the release of *Forlorn River* in 1937. Earlier still in the 1920s, Flannery had designed two other homes in the greater area, one in Beverly Hills for Rudolph Valentino and, much closer to the eventual Beach House, one for Joseph Schenck and Norma Talmadge along Ocean Front in Santa Monica. Flannery seemed to be footloose and fancy free in the late twenties. It may mean little that in some correspondence with Hearst in April 1927 his address was "1229 [N.] Flores Street, Hollywood" (a

residential block in neighboring *West* Hollywood, to be exact, just below Fountain Avenue). In August of that year his address was No. 3 Book Building, Beverly Hills. Perhaps the former was his home, the latter his office. If only there were comparable items in the William Randolph Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library for 1925 and 1926. But there aren't. We have to be satisfied for now with what 1927 can disclose. On August 6 of that year, Hearst told Julia Morgan through his secretary:

> I think Mr. Flannery has done the best he knew how in regard to the Santa Monica work. He is young, and somewhat inexperienced, but he is nevertheless a very good man. He is exceedingly bright and has good taste, and I am very pleased with his work as far as the artistic and architectural side is concerned.

Morgan had been on the Beach House job for more than a year now—since June 1926, as we've seen. With regard to Bill Flannery, Hearst's second paragraph had this to say:

> I think it is very nice of you to consider giving him a somewhat larger percentage [commission], and I really do think that he deserves it, as he has devoted almost his entire time and attention to this work, and has certainly done a good job.

Flannery's lack of credits in film work during the late twenties hereby makes more sense: evidently he wasn't yet active in the industry. Probably far from it, years from it. There's a parallel in a contemporary of his, a young man slated to appear further on in this book named Warren McClure. "Mac," as he was known, was a designer with little formal training. He'd come to Hollywood from Detroit in the early twenties, seeking studio work but finding none. When Mac tried again in the late twenties, he caught on with Hearst and Morgan in Beverly Hills, the site by then of a newer round of remodeling (the "1929 Scheme" in Morgan's Beverly Hills ledgers) on what genuinely *was* the Marion Davies house—the place at 1700 Lexington Road.

For Bill Flannery's screen credits of the late thirties to be conflated with his non-screen credits of the late twenties is nothing unusual in Hearstiana. In fact, conflations, misattributions, and bendings of the timeline are almost more the norm in this realm than the exception.

That said, Hearst's third paragraph to Morgan of August 6, 1927, reads as follows:

> I was going to suggest to you that if you are going to operate in Los Angeles to any extent, it might be worth your consideration to plan some sort of a connection with Mr. Flannery.

Those who know their Hearstian prose will instantly recognize the voice, the manner, the paternal wordiness. The man could be as terse and edgy as Hemingway (true especially of his elder years, the 1930s and 1940s), but in the 1920s—never mind his Christmas letter of 1925—he often roamed pleasantly all over the page; his ultra-efficient secretary, Joe Willicombe, had been at the ready for such dictation and its transmission since 1916. In this instance in 1927, the San Simeonesque mode, so familiar from the Hearst-Morgan correspondence at Cal Poly, pertains to the Beach House instead: the subject differs but not the style or the personality behind it.

As to Morgan's prospects in Los Angeles in the 1920s, she was well in stride already, what with the Long Beach YWCA and the Hollywood Studio Club, with the atrium for the DeMilles in Laughlin Park, and, soon to come but farther afield, with the big YWCA job in Riverside. (The very much latter-day, wishfully imagined Hearst-Morgan role in the Los Altos Apartments on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles is simply dead wrong; the sheer clumsiness of the building, designed by Edward Rust about 1925, would have repelled the discerning Miss Morgan, just as it would have the worldly Mr. Hearst and the gently urbane Miss Davies; not surprisingly, Morgan's authoritative ledgers contain nothing on Los Altos.)

The second half of Hearst's letter on August 6, 1927, began with this sentence, which stood as its own paragraph:

> Another good man is Cedric Gibbons, but Flannery is younger and more amenable and just as clever.

Now the plot thickens. Born in 1893, exactly thirty years after Hearst and five before Flannery (or four years before Marion Davies and Mac McClure, both of whom hailed from 1897), Cedric Gibbons had charge of art design and set decoration at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, a position he'd held since the great merger of 1924 that brought MGM into being. Flannery (or McClure) could aspire no higher, as the rhyme would have it; besides, the dashing Gibbons would be married by 1930 to Dolores del Rio, a lover afterwards of the precocious Orson Welles. Such circumstances, whether of present or future tense, couldn't be more Hearstian, indeed, more Hollywoodian. In 1933 Hearst would engage Gibbons to design the interior of his new Stinson airplane. But that's getting too far ahead of our story. For now, six years prior, Hearst and Marion, aligned through their Cosmopolitan Productions with MGM, were as close to Cedric Gibbons as they were to Irving Thalberg and Louis B. Mayer.

Back to Hearst's letter of August 1927, with three paragraphs to go. He meant Flannery, of course, in telling Morgan:

> I do not hold him responsible for the acts of Carpenter Brothers. He did not have enough of an office force to keep the close supervision over the Carpenter Brothers, but even if he had had such a force, I believe Carpenter Brothers' performances would have eluded any but skilled accountants.

Not exactly the stuff that seven-million-dollar mansions of the 1920s were made of (whose value would be stratospheric in present terms, provided such notions had credibility). Hearst continued on; and then he ended his letter, yet without further reference to Bill Flannery:

> I do not excuse Carpenter Brothers at all. I believe their errors are wil[l]ful and moreover, there are certain things lately discovered which are obviously not errors at all and could not be [errors].
>
> I suppose, however, they are not any more crooked than the average contractor who, finding the machinery for supervision not quite adequate, would probably try to take advantage of the situation.

Hearst leaves us wondering where to turn next—all because of a single letter, a fairly routine one at that. Flannery, Morgan, commissions and payments, Gibbons, Carpenter Bros., errors and duplicity: whither our story? Flannery stood in the eye of the hurricane, Hearst's letter having dwelled on him at its outset, and not unfavorably.

Not so, though, the letter Flannery had received two weeks earlier, dated July 22, 1927, a Friday that found Hearst in Los Angeles (nominally at the Ambassador Hotel, with 1700 Lexington Road in Beverly Hills, where Charles and Frank Carpenter had finished their recent work, being just as nominally the home of Marion). Hearst had told Flannery:

> I want to repeat that the work on the house [the Beach House] is dragging unduly. There seems to be no sufficient supervision, the men are very slow and I am thoroughly dissatisfied. Will you please see what can be done to improve the situation promptly.
>
> 2. Please let me call your attention to the bath room on the top floor East. The tiles are all splitting and the seams are opening and the house is evidently settling in that location, if it is not anywhere else.
>
> The explanation that was formerly given of the pile drivers having shaken the tiles loose is evidently unsuitable to the present situation as there have been no pile drivers for a year or so and the situation is much worse than it ever has been. These tiles will have to be removed unquestionably.
>
> The other important question is whether there will have to be some strengthening of the walls and foundations.

3. The washstands in the various rooms are not what I ordered. I suppose I am being charged for the more expensive type that were ordered and being given the inferior type which is in the bath room.

Here again [it] shows there is no adequate supervision. It seems to me that it is the architect's place to see that the contractors deliver what is ordered. I do not know to what extent material has been supplied of an inferior quality from what we paid for but I think we ought to have that matter carefully investigated by an expert.

I remember that the man who put the water proofing on the pool discovered that the concrete was of such a rotten character in places that they could scrape it away with a board. I suppose there is a lot of that kind of construction, no proper engineering tests evidently having been made.

4. The doors are warping in some of the rooms. I think this may possibly be due to the fact that the wood was not sufficiently kilned and dried. I think it is also due to the fact that the doors are too thin and flimsy. I mentioned this fact at the time that the doors were being put in. I suppose we will have to replace a lot of these doors. Please see that the doors not yet installed are made about fifty percent thicker and of the right kind of wood.

5. It is suggested that we put mirrors in the doors of the dressing room for the pool. I do not know whether the mirrors should go in the doors on the closets as you suggested or should go in the swinging door into the dressing room.

6. I really don't want any dressing tables made for those little dressing rooms. I am sure we can buy whatever we want cheaper and better. Having things made I think is merely an opportunity to run up expenses when Lord knows expenses have been enough.

He signed off with a simple "Sincerely." To the initiated and historically streetwise, another routine letter: we Hearst aficionados have seen their kind many times. The first paragraph, especially, befits any of his newspapers: simply substitute the name of the paper for "house" in the opening line and away we go. It was all too often the story of the man's working life. Now it was the story of his private life,

too, on a scale worse than San Simeon ever posed (though at times the failings there, even on Morgan's watch, can beggar explanation). It's too tempting, too convenient—too premature even—to poke fun here at the fevered notion, so intrinsic in Hearstian lore, that cost was no object, that the man paid top dollar (and then some) for the workmanship he received, be it good, bad, or indifferent. Not that getting fleeced was his rightful lot. The Morgan office, however, had been involved in the Santa Monica job since midway through 1926. Indeed, it had racked up nearly $4,100 in drafting-room time and other expenses thus far, offset by $3,000 that Hearst paid in November 1926, pending further billing from San Francisco.

What on earth was happening?

FOR THE MOMENT, back to July 22, 1927. On that same Friday, Hearst sent Bill Flannery a briefer message about the Beach House:

> The German rooms having been held up by the German government all this time, I am not going to pay any more attention to them and will go ahead and finish the four vacant rooms like the other rooms. That means to paint them and [wall]paper them.
>
> As we need rooms in the house, I would like to begin this work as soon as possible. I would suggest taking out the bunks and using four-posters of Colonial type for beds.
>
> We have a lot of paper that we are going to use on the hall and that would paper one or two of the rooms and we can get other attractive Colonial paper for the rest.

The German rooms, the German rooms. Could Hearst have been serious? In a house whose style was far more conducive to the Colonial touches he mentioned? Yes, he really meant it. After all, he'd written Morgan more than a year earlier—back on June 15, 1926, when things as we can now better assess them were just getting started in Santa Monica. He'd told her then through his secretary:

> When we come to the decoration of the interior of the beach house [Willicombe's lower-case typing], in order to prevent too much similarity in the ten bedrooms, I think it might be well to have on the top floor for instance, one Dutch bedroom, one French bedroom, etcetera.
>
> Of course the majority of the bedrooms would be straight Colonial, and I suggest on the second floor we use interesting papers with white wainscoating [wainscoting], etc.
>
> On the top floor we might want to let the beams show, and get a little different type of treatment, all in the 18th Century period, however.
>
> Enclosed is a little picture of Normandy beds. We will get something like that for one room and I have a Dutch bed which I got from Falvy [Albert Falvey, a San Francisco art dealer] and which is stored somewhere.

Bill Flannery had a role to play in this eclecticism, this echoing of San Simeon and Hearst's other showplaces—had had a role since early in 1927, maybe earlier still. A relative lack of records for 1926 makes it impossible to know.

What *is* known in this vein for 1926 is that twice in August that year and once in November, Hearst had shipped carloads of objects, mostly furniture, from his main warehouse compound in the Bronx, New York, direct to Los Angeles. Although the items fell outside Julia Morgan's normal sphere, they somehow turned up in her Pacific Coast Register, her behemoth inventory in the Morgan-Forney Collection. What a godsend that they did. The roughly two hundred chairs, tables, and the like that Hearst shipped west are too briefly described to be traceable, unlike San Simeon or Wyntoon's often detailed provenances. The emphasis, nonetheless, was unquestionably on the eighteenth century, divided between British and Early American objects, a heightened interest in Hearst's collecting since the early 1920s. The standout, contained in the first August shipment, was recorded as "Panelled Room from Cassiobury Park, Hertfordshire." How many

other paneled rooms Hearst secured for the Beach House is unclear. (The recent German ones, mostly "peasant" examples from Austria, would never get any closer than New York, where they would sit uncrated for years. And the mantelpieces we've long heard about, in whatever numbers? Scarcely a single *antique* example figures this early in the Beach House game.) If Morgan's P C Register is taken as gospel—extreme caution is advised here—the Cassiobury room stood alone through the twenty Hearst-Davies years in Santa Monica, a uniquely antique pedigree within a house meant to be a virtual movie set, much more so than increasingly museum-like San Simeon ever was. Perhaps that was quite enough for Hearst's resourceful, madly clever ways. In contrast, Howard Heyn's article of 1949 in the *Los Angeles Examiner* indicates that one such historical room was *far* from enough. But how to be sure when Santa Monica lacks a "Built-in Inventory" of the kind San Simeon relies on, a methodical, itemized listing of the vintage architectural features that the Beach House absorbed? Another indicator would be Marion's saying of 415 after she and Hearst sold the place in 1947 that it "had been so beautiful inside"—but that now its altered, unrecognizable exteriors were in need of paint.

While glimpsing those three carload shipments of 1926, we should take note of another letter from Hearst to Bill Flannery. This one's dated Sunday, July 24, 1927:

> The Sunday crowd, most of which occupied our fence at the beach today, shows the necessity of immediately making the necessary construction to prevent such annoyance.
>
> The wall must positively be raised about two feet. The outside ledge must be eliminated very positively in the way you suggest.
>
> I have a plan for raising the wall two or three feet when needed. It is to have a section between the tree boxes, which falls down on a hinge from the inside and another section which falls down on a hinge from the outside edge. When these are down they lie flat, one on top of the

> other, and when they are erect they make the wall two or three feet higher.
>
> I think this can work out in a practical way, but if it cannot we will have to raise the wall permanently two or three feet.
>
> I would like to see you about this tomorrow (Monday) morning [the 25th] as early as convenient.

You'll be wondering how Hearst, whose mechanical aptitude was deeply ingrained, could write these words on a Sunday and have them put before Flannery in time for a meeting the next day. Similar riddles exist elsewhere in his correspondence; they usually point to some basic explanation. Chances are, Flannery was close by on that Sunday, making him reachable by courier; San Simeon and Wyntoon provide parallel examples. In any event, Flannery got the message from the Chief, as Hearst was often called.

But what about those German rooms mentioned two days before, on July 22? Head scratchers for sure—until we go back to the first of 1927, back to the earliest instances of Hearst-Flannery correspondence in The Bancroft files. January 29 offers this item, a brief, unsigned message most likely from Joe Willicombe:

"Dear Mr. Flannery," it says. "Enclosed find Mr. Hearst's check for five hundred which he promised in connection with the European expedition."

Another man would be the one making the trip, not Flannery. The latter's bearing on the work in Santa Monica is also obvious from the following, a telegram he sent Willicombe at San Simeon on Wednesday, February 9:

> Have made thorough search of antique and wrought iron shops but was unable to find any antique fire screens or reproductions of them. [H. H.] Hecox [Hearst's local warehouseman] has none in Los Angeles storage. [Chris] McGregor [of Hearst's Bronx warehouse] has only one pair of Italian andirons in New York. Have several books of old design[s] for

> fire screen[s] and have talked with the wrought iron firm [of Ed Trinkkeller] that made all the grills on the ranch [San Simeon] and feel confident that they will be capable of making reproductions in the old manner if agreeable to the Chief. I will come up to the ranch Sunday morning [February 13] and take dimensions of the fire place openings and get further particulars. Please advise.

Julia Morgan had been prospecting as well. She would soon be telling Hearst, "Came upon some old iron work from Granada [Spain] suitable for [conversion to] fire screens." She had done so in downtown Santa Barbara, three blocks from her Margaret Baylor Inn. Hearst followed up, checkbook in hand . . . as it were.

But mid-February 1927 was no time for *anyone,* not even a youthful, determined Bill Flannery, to be visiting San Simeon for any reason: the enchanted hilltop was cold, wet, windswept, courtesy of ferocious winter storms. The buying trip we first heard about on January 29 was under way, however, but not through Flannery, as mentioned before. Instead, the trip had been entrusted to a German expatriate in the Los Angeles art-and-film colony named Kurt Meyer-Radon. Make that *Dr.* Meyer-Radon. This obscure player on the Hearstian stage was a physician, no less, and an architect to boot. (He'd soon be designing the Sovereign Hotel and Apartments in Santa Monica, not much more than a stone's throw from the Beach House; the building has been misattributed at times to Morgan, whose YWCA hostelries it strikingly resembles.) Accordingly, Hearst, with Santa Monica in mind, cabled his news-bureau chief at Universal Service in Paris, on April 6, 1927. He asked the man, "Do you know anybody in Germany who is thoroughly reliable and competent to expertise [evaluate] peasant rooms which our special agent there [Dr. Meyer-Radon] has located?" Hearst emphasized that the person "must be real antique expert and determine not only genuineness but value." He added predictably that the rooms were "being overpriced."

There's more to this improbable tale, this droll backstory that's surely *not* what Anne Edwards and others were imagining in telling us about the pleasure dome built by Hearst for Marion Davies. A brief message dates from April 13, 1927. Willicombe sent it to the same bureau chief as before, at Universal Service in Paris:

> Enclosed are photographs of the rooms and furniture in Germany that Mr. Hearst wants your expert to inspect as to genuine antiquity and approximate value. Also enclosed are communications received by Mr. Flannery which illuminate the subject, and list of prices, descriptions, etc., which you will find valuable in identifying the furniture and rooms as the ones Mr. Hearst is interested in.

Hearst himself cabled Paris three days later, on April 16, saying that the "antique expert" was to meet with Kurt Meyer-Radon and was to "get lowest possible prices of rooms and furniture." They should be "dealer's prices to him," Hearst specified, "as he is our agent and will be paid by us for his services."

IN THE MIDST OF THESE PROCEEDINGS—on April 8, 1927—Willicombe wrote to Flannery from San Simeon, using the latter's address in West Hollywood: "Mr. Hearst instructs me to advise you that he has received the following telegram from Miss Head in London." This was the same Alice Head, of course, who'd been in California for the first time in the fall of 1926—and, again, the same Miss Head (on behalf of the National Magazine Company) through whom Hearst had bought St. Donat's Castle in Wales in 1925. In fact, the cable from her in April 1927 began with a reference to that ancient estate. But it was this part of her relayed message that concerned Bill Flannery and his efforts in Santa Monica:

> Bought painted ceiling for one [hundred] thirty-five pounds. Will rush it to Los Angeles. Central panel ground work cream and blue; lady in red

with blue draperies. Border brown; ground garlands mixed colours; corners grey green.

The ceiling equates with the one described by Howard Heyn in 1949—the one "imported from an old London town house," the one whose gold-leaf finish was applied by a group of "New York artisans" and whose setting was the Green Room (or Reception Room) on the first floor of the Beach House.

The roughly $650 in 1927 dollars represented here—think of roughly $8,000 today—was the kind of money Hearst liked to pay. He figured he got fleeced by dealers too often as it was. When a bargain came his way, he grabbed it, as did Alice Head and others who bought on his behalf, both at home and abroad. San Simeon already had its fair share of windfall purchases to offset the splurges. Surely Santa Monica would be no exception. The nouveau riche of Hollywood would scarcely take notice or be the wiser at all. Hadn't Louis B. Mayer said, according to his oft-quoted daughter Irene Mayer Selznick (*A Private View*, 1983), "When we need a set at the studio, we build it overnight"? Hadn't he also said, "Don't be at the mercy of those contractors"? And this too: "Don't start with the architects. With us, it's business, it gets done." Yes, and he and the much-older Uncle William, as Irene fondly called Hearst, were the best of friends, even after the falling out with Mayer in 1934 (professional not personal) that pushed Hearst and Marion from MGM in Culver City through Cahuenga Pass to Warner Bros. in Burbank, Cosmopolitan Bungalow in tow.

Indeed, it was mostly for show at the Beach House, mostly for vivid effect—the stuff (as Miss Head herself might have said) that a party place, a virtual world's fair pavilion next to Santa Monica Bay, could handily (and at times almost ephemerally) consist of, built to the best Hollywood studio, false-front standards. Hearst was a past master at such pomp and pretense, second to none. He'd have shaken his head

sadly to be as misunderstood on this key point as posterity so often insists on doing.

On April 18, William Edward Flannery (his full name appeared on his letterhead) invoiced Hearst in care of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles:

> For professional services rendered in the designing and superintendence of Beach Residence at Santa Monica, California . . .
>
> $2500 on account, balance due on bill rendered April 1 [1927], $500.
>
> TOTAL $3,000
>
> Payments on Beach Residence up to date—

Oct. 2, 1926	$500
Nov. 21, 1926	1500
Dec. 15, 1926	2500
Jan. 23, 1927	2000
Feb. 20, 1927	500
Mch. 1, 1927	3000
Apr. 1, 1927	2500

Excluding the $3,000 for April 1927, an even $10,000 can be tallied for the six installments running from October 1926 to the following March—no mean sum when converted from 1920s dollars to those of eight or nine decades later (imagine $125,000 today). Flannery made out famously: the often slow-paying Hearst settled up in less than a week: "Rec'd April 24-[19]27" reads the young designer's handwritten notation.

Likewise in late April, Flannery pursued his absentee yet important role in the German buying trip. He cabled Kurt Meyer-Radon in Berlin on April 26. This was ten days after Hearst's cable to Paris, recounted earlier, about the "antique expert." Flannery's short message was similar: "Our Paris representative [at Universal Service] has been advised to come and see you and complete [the] negotiations

for buying rooms." Flannery was still well within Hearst's favor. "Charge *L.A. Examiner*, Chief Executive Account," he informed the telegrapher.

Not quite a month later, Hearst was in the midst of one of his New York backslidings. Such visits were still somewhat common in the 1920s, before he and his wife separated once and for all and before he began favoring California so decidedly in the 1930s. Flannery wrote to Willicombe at the Clarendon on May 21.

(Meanwhile, on May 16, Willicombe had heard by telegram from his main assistant in Los Angeles with news about enlarging the Beach House property: "Regarding beach lots Will Rogers advises [that] Mrs. Rogers will he here Wednesday or Thursday [the 18th or 19th] and take matter up. Will try then [to] get better terms.")

Back to the Clarendon and Bill Flannery's letter. The place had been Hearst's royal residence on Riverside Drive and 86th Street on the Upper West Side of Manhattan since the early 1900s—a place that made the Beach House seem almost like a poor relation. Flannery began by telling Willicombe, "As per your instructions by wire, am enclosing list of sizes for the various rugs that are needed." His list gave some names of rooms that, unlike the well-known Refectory and Assembly Room at San Simeon, are elusive or forgotten or just plain unknown (but see Appendix III). "Roadside Sun Room Third Floor" was the largest one, a narrow space nearly forty feet long. Flannery also mentioned H. P. Philibosian, an Armenian rug dealer in Los Angeles whom Hearst patronized at times.

"If, however," Flannery added, "you want to look for the First Floor Hall rugs in New York, [I] will give dimensions." That was standard practice with Hearst, as an old pro like Julia Morgan very well knew: toss a virtual public-relations bone now and then to the local carriage trade, such as the man in Santa Barbara with the Spanish

ironwork. But for more serious buying of the kind Hearst had been doing firsthand in New York for a long time, rely on French & Company or Duveen Brothers or comparable gilt-edged traders in that pulsating hub of the art market—specifically, when it came to the better grade of rugs and carpets, on dealers like Kent Costikyan. Either way, Hearst had a long, long way to go before his costs, even at Jazz Age prices in a heady year like 1927, would approach the millions he purportedly spent on furnishing the Beach House. In the meantime, only one other Californian had a grasp of that larger, far-removed market, a command of its ways that rivaled or in some respects even exceeded Hearst's. And yet before Flannery's snail-mail list of rugs got to New York, Henry E. Huntington, the Lord of San Marino (to Hearst's Lord of San Simeon), died at age seventy-seven in Philadelphia on Monday, May 23.

Flannery soon wrote to Willicombe again in New York. His letter, dated June 7, warrants a careful reading:

> Inclosed please find interior which I think carries out the Chief's instructions, regarding the heating, in his telegram of last Saturday [June 4].
>
> Please be kind enough to show it to him and tell him that this scheme can also be adapted for the Dining Room, treating the carved grilles in the manner of Grinling Gibbons. The grilles in the Drawing Room can be gilted to harmonize with the ivory and gold scheme of decoration, and in the Dining Room to be painted to harmonize with the Grinling Gibbons carvings.
>
> I think the Chief's solution of this problem a most happy one, and [it] will add to, rather than detract from, the decoration of the room.

The Gibbons in question was no forebear of Cedric Gibbons, the MGM art director. Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721) was a master wood carver, an acclaimed artist who'd been active in England more than two centuries earlier. With strong undercurrents of the English taking hold in Santa Monica, the Gibbons influence, though a bit older than the

late eighteenth-century emphasis Hearst was favoring, lay close to the heart of Santa Monica's look and feel, to its historical rhythms that, in their better moments, would surpass the place's party-house potential.

To hear Flannery tell it, the "manner of Grinling Gibbons" was being considered whereas, in his next sentence, the "Grinling Gibbons carvings" seemed to bespeak the real thing. Regardless, a few words like these could be grist for the gullibility mill, ideal for anyone who's convinced (as many are) that the Beach House was every bit as treasure-laden as San Simeon was.

But hold on a moment; not so fast.

Hearst's Bronx warehouse had a recent acquisition catalogued as "a quantity of Grinling Gibbons cherry and oak wood carvings." The group consisted of five such items. They may never have gone to California in the 1920s or at any later time. If in fact these were the carvings Flannery meant, he may simply have been planning to rely on *images* of them that skilled artisans could work from. Hearst's warehouse manager in New York could supply all the museum-quality prints one might need, exemplifying the best photography in that emulsion-rich era.

This technique had been a Hearst-Morgan specialty at San Simeon almost from day one, a variation on their use of vintage art works and architectural elements gleaned from the westbound carloads. Why not do the same in Santa Monica? It was a proven approach, a method with much to recommend it: use the antique one minute and then an artisan-made copy the next, as the occasion dictated. Seldom were any two versions or blendings precisely alike, lest a good designer tire of repetition and the results be lacking.

But not so fast once more with such comments. In her tape-recorded memoirs of 1951, Marion Davies, the Beach House chatelaine herself, put fleeting yet sure emphasis on the "Gibbons carvings" she

remembered as having been there, conveying the impression that they'd indeed amounted to something. And in 1949, Howard Heyn had confidently said that the items in question were "originals" from Cassiobury Park; moreover, Hearst is known through the annals of the British art market to have bought Gibbons carvings like these in England in 1922. Yet it may never be possible to know where and to what degree the old and the new co-existed in a building razed more than half a century ago, backed by so relatively few records. Suffice it to say that for all such blends of materials at the exhaustively known San Simeon and at the nearly as well-known Wyntoon—and often enough at the Beach House too—the mindless, cookie-cutter approach was minimized.

IN HAVING GONE BACK AND FORTH along the 1927 timeline, we can return now to a familiar stretch in the Hearst-Flannery correspondence, the mid-summer period of that year. On August 15, Hearst sent his designer the following:

> Here is a memorandum of the things we talked about.
>
> The candles are to be larger in the chandeliers in the library and the lights are to be the same size as the lights on the standards.
>
> 2. Please make proper connection for the mantel light in all the rooms so that the mantels candelabra can be put into use.
>
> 3. The fluted wash-stand in the little room on [the] third floor is alright. Please install those throughout the house.
>
> 4. Please remember the trees are to be removed from the garden.
>
> 5. Kindly ask Uffler to plant heliotrope over arbors—nothing else.
>
> 6. The climbing roses that I want are a small pink climbing rose that blooms winter and summer.
>
> We have them on House A at the ranch [Casa del Mar at San Simeon]. If Uffler does not know what they are he can learn from Macklin [head gardener at the ranch].

> 7. Please remember that the big bed is to be repaired and kindly let me know what pieces you have as French [Mitchell Samuels of French & Company] said he had all the pieces and if he has not I will make him take off something [give a discount] for the bed.

Three days after Flannery's letter—on August 18, 1927—Julia Morgan, acting in the unguarded, off-the-cuff manner of a private correspondent, wrote hundreds of words. How revealing they are, seldom seen before and surely never published till now. Apart from the Big Three archives cited thus far, the following hails from an obscure source, namely, from UC Berkeley's Environmental Design Archives and its Edward Hussey Collection. (Hussey apprenticed on Morgan's staff in the 1920s.) Morgan's letter went to another colleague of hers, Walter Steilberg, who was touring Europe that summer of 1927. Years later, certain letters like it passed into Edward Hussey's hands (Steilberg had evidently managed to bring this one home and save it).

As esteemed a friend as Morgan ever had, Steilberg was a Bay Area architect whom she fully regarded as her equal; moreover, he was someone with enviable engineering skills, which—as she was quick to admit—surpassed her limited training in that field in the 1890s. Born in 1886, not quite fifteen years after Morgan, Steilberg had graduated from UC Berkeley in 1910; by then, both the design and engineering curriculums at Cal had matured exponentially.

"Dear Walter," she began on August 18:

> If I have not written, it is not that I have not followed you in mind. Days have been oftener than not just barely gotten by with. But an accident, by good luck, made me go back to Dr. Willits, & she insisted on my doing what I should have had sense enough to have seen & done myself. So am on the real mend, and gaining in energy if not in weight.

She was alluding to her ear surgery in the fall of 1926, to the episode that began with what Thad Joy had called her "serious intestinal illness"—but which, in reality, stemmed from the long-

postponed treatment of a potentially debilitating mastoid condition. It was a chronic problem for her that would require more surgery in the future.

Morgan devoted her next paragraph to San Simeon, telling Steilberg:

> The Hill work still goes on. Please go up soon after your return & tell us if it is worth anything or not before your eyes tire. It seems sometimes quite lovely these days, & then again, very discouraging. We are covering it [Casa Grande, the main "Castle" structure] entirely with [lime]stone to the tower tops—& it has a more serious air.

Morgan had told Hearst back in May that the "stone facing" was being newly applied. Soon afterward, on June 3, 1927, she'd spoken well of this noble veneer, a far cry from the simple stucco finishes that prevailed with the Spanish Colonial Revival and related styles in California. And thus on June 8: "Your decision to use the real stone facing is going to be the making of the building." Voilà, Miss Morgan; which has to leave us wondering whether anyone ever said much at all, positive or negative, about the more common clapboard siding on the Beach House. Evidently not.

She ended her letter of August 18 with a staccato of references—with a citing of jobs involving the Morgan office, such as the Honolulu YWCA:

> Santa Barbara opened happily [the Margaret Baylor Inn]. I should have kept a better hand on the finishing but it was selected while I was down & out [late in 1926] & could not well be helped. The dining room is the best [feature] on the whole—gay & pretty.
>
> We are to go [ahead] on the 1st unit of the UC Museum [a Hearst commission in Berkeley] this fall or winter—as the [UC] Auditorium space is not free. . . .
>
> T. J. [Thad Joy] is disturbed by unrest, feels he's not getting on fast enough etc. I do wish he could follow your [current] footsteps over Europe for 6 months! . . .

> We are doing a "plant" for the Oakland Post Enquirer [a Hearst newspaper] on Franklin St. and a YW[CA] at Riverside (wish you were collaborating on [it]), a Native Daughters [building] here in S.F. etc. Enough to be busy on.

Busy indeed. And yet nowhere amid these uniquely revealing lines did Morgan say a word about the Beach House at 415 Ocean Front in Santa Monica.

MORGAN HERSELF FIGURED in a message from Hearst to Flannery, addressed to the latter at the Book Building in Beverly Hills; the date was September 7, 1927:

> I think you would better arrange the matter of payment through Miss Morgan's office to avoid confusion.
>
> She told me she had a percentage division with you and she also told me she was contemplating readjusting this arrangement, somewhat in your favor.
>
> This being the case, I think you should make your arrangements with her,—inform her as to what you have received and what is still coming to you and arrange with her for payment.
>
> Then the payment can be made through Mr. Penn [a Hearst employee] or in any way you and Miss Morgan agree upon.

A month later right on the nose—on October 7—Hearst had this to tell Flannery, whom he again wrote to in Beverly Hills:

> Will you please send back the rugs in the north sun room on the third floor, and please let me know what has been done about the chair coverings for the library that I selected. I picked out the two sofas at Bullocks and the four uncovered chairs are from in the library [and are] ready to be covered. Can we have this done as soon as possible?
>
> Furthermore, I think the rug in the library should be taken out, as it is hopelessly bad, and that we should determine whether we want the carpet rug or the red rug which they have taken to smooth out the wrinkles.

Not exactly the famous Ardebil mosque carpet from old-time Persia—not any of these clunkers. Hearst closed on a more hopeful note, befitting his endless quest for beauty and dazzling effect:

> Please remember the question of marble ladders for the pool. What did you determine to do about them?

Flannery's answer isn't among The Bancroft cited in this chapter. Nonetheless, someone (Hearst himself seems a good prospect) determined that the marble ladders should precisely echo those at San Simeon. And so they did. This wouldn't be the last time the San Simeon and Santa Monica pools would crop up together in some way, in some capacity. Much earlier in 1927, Hearst had wired Morgan from Los Angeles with these brief yet eye-catching words: "If new marble [for San Simeon] not scheduled to arrive promptly I advise using tile on pool as at Santa Monica." It was white marble, of course, that carried the day on the enchanted hilltop, witness the jaw-dropping Neptune Pool.

Morgan weighed in again before the fall of 1927 got any further along, right after Hearst's rugs-and-ladders message to Bill Flannery. She had important things to tell Hearst on Saturday, October 8; she wrote to him care of the *Los Angeles Examiner:*

> We find at the Beach House a system of emergency lighting which is only partly installed. . . .
>
> There seems to be some question as to whether or not Carpenter Brothers were ordered to do this work. . . . If this system is not completed, there is some doubt as to how much of the amount already expended can be recovered from Carpenter Brothers.
>
> The electrician estimates that it will cost not more than $500 to complete the installation. Shall we complete this system or shall we abandon it and try to effect an adjustment with Carpenter Brothers and any other parties involved?

Hearst's response, dated October 10, went by wire from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Yes, he told Morgan, the emergency lighting she described should surely be completed for the amount specified.

Concurrently, another letter of Morgan's to Walter Steilberg, who was still in Europe, was now heading his way. She'd written to him on October 7, coinciding with Hearst's message to Bill Flannery about rugs and marble ladders:

> The pool water [at San Simeon] is beautifully clear & of lovely color. I saw the Santa Monica pool last week, & the Hill water was better. The S.M. [Beach House] pool has had to have all its piping system & water supply increased as it took about 3 days to empty & fill! It's quite pretty & gay—the bridge [over it] not bad. The tennis court has no cover & no one misses it. Flowers are all around on top of the piling[s] in boxes [a wall preceding the later bulkhead against sand encroachment]—& they are doing well. The whole place looks better than I ever thought possible, but is a sad waste of good money in the last analysis. Also the Carpenter Bros. got careless financially & had to be removed. We are finishing up from here, now [San Francisco], as a matter of accommodation.

Before she signed off, Morgan had some equally choice words about San Simeon, the job to beat all jobs, bar none:

> The Hill work goes on—all real Manti [Utah] stone now from toe to last upstanding hair. In some ways you won't know it [recognize it]. But I have sneaking suspicion it is coming out pretty well in spite of everything.

But not so fast again, this time regarding bad press on Carpenter Bros. Before October 1927 was out, Hearst's local morning rival, the despised *Los Angeles Times* (the feeling was mutual vis-à-vis Hearst's *Examiner*), had rousing words about the builders in question. They'd be taking part in the opening "of a new financing and building concern to be known as the Better Homes Co-operative Association, Inc.," with

its headquarters to be in Beverly Hills, led by a financier "formerly of New York City":

> Other officers are Charles R. Carpenter, vice-president, and Frank W. Carpenter, secretary and treasurer. . . who have built many of the famous homes of Beverly Hills, Hollywood and Santa Monica, including those of L. B. Mayer [625 Ocean Front], Joseph M. Schenck [also on Ocean Front], Marion Davies, R. E. Overell [probably Walter E. Overell in La Canada-Flintridge], the Ojai [Valley Country] Club and many others. They were awarded the prize [in 1924] after the Ojai Club was built [in the early twenties] by the Southern California chapter, American Institute of Architects [whose members included the Ojai Club's designer, the renowned Wallace Neff].

In any event, the problems Morgan was more than merely alluding to in her October letters were now in the lap of the Carpenters' successor, George Loorz. That's why he'd been brought in two months before: to restore order and to bring better techniques—and surely a better attitude—to a job soured for whatever reason by that high-rolling duo from Beverly Hills. (Several years later Loorz would remind Morgan of "the difficulties that beset the Carpenter Bros." when he was sent to Santa Monica.) Loorz would be called upon to perform similar wonders at San Simeon as of 1932. For now, he stayed on in Santa Monica through the fall of 1927 and into the first part of 1928, not returning to Berkeley until April of that year.

Bill Flannery remained on the job through the fall. He was also present and accounted for, albeit fleetingly, in August 1928, whereupon his Santa Monica trail grows cold forever more. The last surviving message between him and Hearst in The Bancroft items is a telegram dated October 15, 1927, received by Hearst a week after Morgan's two letters quoted above. It brings the still somewhat vague story of William Flannery at the Beach House to an unsettled end—and an unsettling one, despite the single reference to him the following year, thanks to Cal Poly's holdings.

Flannery's wire to Hearst went out early that Saturday afternoon in the fall of 1927, direct to San Simeon:

> Hate to trouble you with matters of this sort, but can get no satisfaction from anyone in your organization in spite of your letter of authorization to Mister Penn a month ago and repeated promises from Mister Penn and Doctor [Frank] Barham [the publisher of Hearst's *Los Angeles Herald* evening paper] and others.
>
> Have been unable to get any money to meet pressing financial obligations of which they are well aware. Have no money to meet pay roll. Had note due at bank yesterday and am overdrawn in bank for past salary not to mention not a cent of money for personal living expenses, all due to procrastination of various members of your organization whom you have authorized to take care of this matter for you.
>
> In view of this unnecessary condition will you please do what you can for me personally at your earliest possible convenience.

Neither Morgan herself nor anyone on her staff had made the long trip to Santa Monica in the first half of 1927. The date July 16 appears in her first Beach House ledger, with a substantial $65 (think of $800 today) recorded as the expense involved; this means, at a glance, that she focused on Santa Monica alone that time, without stopping in, say, Santa Barbara or Hollywood. Nor was she at San Simeon in mid-July. It proved to be the only time she visited Santa Monica in 1927 until late November; and by then she also had the new Riverside YWCA to consider. Her office manager, the very able James LeFeaver (an engineer and on-site veteran of the Honolulu Y), had led the way in 1927 by visiting Santa Monica on July 6, ten days before Morgan appeared. LeFeaver was back again twice in August, three times in September, and twice in each of the remaining months that year. Morgan had plainly entrusted a big part of the job to him, evidently most of the executive details for the moment. She'd also passed the torch in August, of course, to George Loorz, a man as young as Bill Flannery (born a month earlier than him in 1898), a master

builder in the offing whose future with Hearst and Morgan would be long-lived and vibrant, making him a diplomat and troubleshooter like no other.

Morgan's initial ledger on Santa Monica—begun in June 1926, the second largest of what would become multiple Beach House ledgers—gained its final entries through the early months of 1928. Its "Closed" status went hand in hand with Loorz's departure in April.

How to sum up the development thus far of the Beach House? An old postcard shows the main building at 415 Ocean Front in all its Colonial Revival dignity. The producer of the card proudly stated above the photo, "A beautiful home, beautifully weather-stripped by Chamberlain." The caption underneath is about the only one on any period photo of the Beach House that comes close to getting things right:

Marion Davies' Beach Home
Santa Monica, Calif.
Architects; Miss Julia Morgan,
Wm. E. Flannery
General Contractors
Carpenter Brothers, Inc.

Hearst himself went unmentioned, uncredited, as though he were just a bit player in a silent movie, soon to be forgotten with the advent of sound.

Morgan wired him at San Simeon early in 1928, on January 17; she asked if he'd given the Chamberlain people "permission to use San Simeon and Beach House photographs as advertising."

The master propagandist replied the same day, likewise by economically worded wire:

> I have no objection to Chamberlain Weather Strip Company using San Simeon. I have nothing to do with Beach House.

Nothing indeed. No, he'd done nothing more than conceive the whole idea behind the Beach House and carry it out thus far in every little detail, a place that would be his Hearst Castle in greater Los Angeles as much as it would be Marion's. No one besides Morgan or other Hearst-Davies insiders needed to know that, though, not the Chamberlain Company or anyone else, with the rarest exceptions.

By now, entering a year that in many ways would find the twenties roaring to their utmost, with the Wall Street Crash too far away still to sound a discordant note, Hearst had the world trained to sing in perfect harmony.