

A 20-minute paper presented by Dr Sarah Riviere at the International Women's Writing Association Conference, Falmouth University 2026

TITLE:

**MARIAN DA CAMARA CHACE AND COOPERATIVE DWELLING
AT THE SCHINDLER HOUSE IN WEST HOLLYWOOD, LA**

*THE LETTER FROM THE DESERT, COACHELLA, 1922 (Chace, M. DaC., n.d.,
unpublished manuscript)*

Themes:

Cultural, historical & social contexts; Writing women's lives; Cooperative Dwelling; Self-build; Smith College USA; 1922; Californian Modernism; architectural authorship; archival voices.

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ABSTRACT:

In late September 1922, Marian DaCamara Chace wrote to Pauline Gibling Schindler from Coachella in the Californian desert (Chace, M. DaC., n.d.). Her letter (see Figure 1) is immediately and physically evocative, as Marian describes the desert heat, her full breasts and a missing breast pump, stunning landscapes with “wonderful moonlit nights”, and the cold water in which she bathed two chatty babies: her own Anne Harriet and little “Pablito”, the son of her hosts, Paul and Betty Popenoe.

Marian, her husband Clyde, and four-month-old Anne Harriet were staying at Coachella near Palm Springs (see Figure 2), while Pauline, her husband Rudolf and their baby Mark were back at 835 Kings Road, Los Angeles (commonly known as the “Schindler House,” see Figure 3), the shared house that the Schindlers and the Chaces were working on as a cooperative dwelling, and to which Marian’s letter was addressed.

The letter’s content reveals the active and as yet unacknowledged role that Marian took on the house at 835 Kings Road. It shows the lives of the two couples—the Chaces and the Schindlers—as being closely intertwined, with their home taking a central position, with creative ideas and questions relating to the shared project flowing freely between them.

However, within two years of this vibrant letter having been penned from the desert, Pauline was struggling with her mental health, and “on 21 June 1924 made an unsuccessful attempt at suicide” (Hines, 2019, p. 52). Soon after, in July 1924, Marian and Clyde left the project with their young family to embark on a new life in Florida.

Their shared cooperative enterprise at 835 Kings Road had failed.

This 20-minute paper locates this original and unpublished archival letter by Marian daCamara Chace within discourse on feminist archives (Hartmann, 2012; Hartman, 2022; Haraway, 2016). Grounded in historical research on the lived history of the house at 835 Kings Road (the “Schindler House”) the paper reveals the significant yet unacknowledged role of Marian DaCamara Chace on this self-build residential project in West Hollywood, Los Angeles. In doing so it challenges the authorship of Schindler as sole “architect” of the house at 835 Kings Road, and reveals the ongoing impact of the denial of unacknowledged voices within the architectural design process.

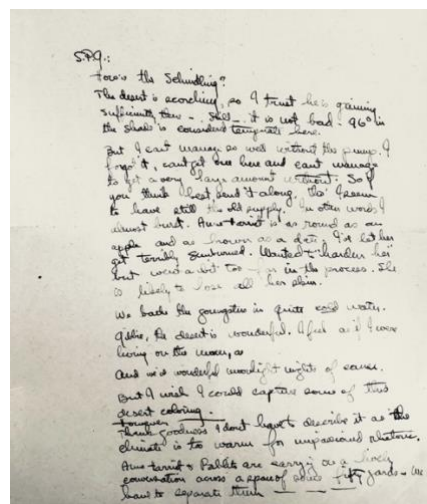


Figure 1: Excerpt from Marian Chace’s 1922 letter to Pauline Schindler. (ADC/ UCSB).

CONFERENCE PAPER TEXT

Presented with archival images (*ADC/ UCSB*) found at: Riviere_IWWA_Marian DaCamara Chace and_The Schindler House.pdf

IMAGE 1: TITLE PAGE

Introduction: 1:30

Dr Sarah Riviere, Senior Lecturer here at Falmouth University in Architecture
This paper presents an unpublished archived letter by Marian Da Camara Chace (Chace, M. DaC., n.d.). Marian was an unacknowledged co-creator of a project of cooperative dwelling in 1920s LA . In this paper, her unpublished Letter from the Desert enables me to address the theme of enabling silenced voices in the design and construction process.

I hope the work can add to discourse and practice on how - by enabling lost voices – we can design more cooperative ways of working and living together, to find other ways to live together differently and more cooperatively, in our communities.

IMAGE 2: Marian DaCamara Chace holding baby Anne-Harriet at 835 Kings Road, 1922 (*ADC/ UCSB*).

DISCOURSE: the work is located in rigorous archival research

This research is located in the call by Donna Harraway (in *Staying with the Trouble, making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016)) for the development of other possible ways of being “less deadly, more respons-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise...” in our lives and our communities

It is also located in the work of Saidiya Hartman on the archive and feminist narrative in *Wayward Lives*, (October Magazine in Spring 2022) where she describes the future impact of narratives that are created following “exhaustive” archival research. Such narratives can challenge existing rigid and perpetuated structures and processes, and enable a different form of practice. Such is my aim for the architectural design process.

IMAGE 3: Pauline Gibling Schindler holding baby Mark at 835 Kings Road, 1922 (*ADC/ UCSB*).

DISCOURSE: the work is located in rigorous case study research on the Schindler House at 835 Kings Road

My case study for this work is the House at 835 Kings Road in Los Angeles, commonly known as the “Schindler House”.

Constructed in 1922 as a form of assisted self-build for four residents – in the constellation of two couples – the Chaces and the Schindlers: Marian Da Camara Chase – Clyde Chace, Pauline Gibling Schindler, Rudolf Schindler

I selected this project because I was inspired by the ambition of the four residents to create a cooperative dwelling together, to build a shared home that would house their four individual creative lives.

The case study is particularly significant as the cooperative element broke down within two years, with three of the four residents leaving the project.

Housekeeping: this presentation includes a mention of self-harm
This image shows Pauline Gibling Schindler holding baby Mark at 835 Kings Road, 1922. Mark was born in July 1922, about the same time as the house was completed. Here Pauline and Mark are photographed with the completed slab tilt concrete walls of 835 Kings Road behind them

IMAGE 4: Clyde Chace and Rudolf Schinder working at the self-build home at 835 Kings Road, 1922 (*ADC/ UCSB*).

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: the work is located in rigorous case study research on the Schindler House at 835 Kings Road

This image shows Clyde Chace and Rudolf Schinder working at the self-build home at 835 Kings Road, 1922.

Introduce Marian

Marian daCamara Chace (1892–1978), grew up in Florida where her family ran the “big store” on the high street of her home town , West Palm Beach - the Palm Beach Mercantile Company

She graduated in 1915 from Smith College in Massachusetts, where she had met Pauline Gibling, later her co-resident on the house at 835 Kings Road, to whom she writes this letter in 1922

When Marian and Pauline graduated from Smith in 1915, they found themselves among the first few generations of female college graduates in the US. They found that women had a limited range of options to work, let alone to earn fair wages for that work.

Marian married Clyde Chace, in December 1917, at Camp Custer, Calhoun County, Michigan, where Clyde was enlisted as an engineer.

Clyde came from a family of established American Quakers - and they drove together from Cincinnati to Los Angeles in Summer 1921

eager to start their new lives in California” (Eastwood, 1989). They were planning a home for cooperative drawing with the Schindlers in LA

In early May 1922 (Smith, 2001, p. 22) Marian and Clyde moved into the partly constructed house shortly before their daughter, Anne Harriet’s birth in May. The notice of completion for the house at 835 Kings Road was issued after their move, in early June 1922

IMAGE 5: The Popenoe House, Coachella, 1922 (*ADC/ UCSB*).

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: the work is located in archival research into lost voices, specifically that of Marian DaCamara Chace.

This image shows The Popenoe House, Coachella, 1922, where Marian DaCamara Chace was staying when she wrote the Letter from the Desert, that is the theme of this paper.

Introducing the letter from the desert: in September 1922 Marian, her husband Clyde, and four-month-old Anne Harriet were staying at Coachella near Palm Springs (see image 5) in the Californian desert) where they were

constructing a house for the Popenoe Family, while Pauline, her husband Rudolf and their new baby Mark were back at 835 Kings Road, Los Angeles

Marian's letter from Coachella (which I will read as part of this paper) is evocative, as Marian describes the desert heat, her full breasts and a missing breast pump, stunning landscapes with "wonderful moonlit nights", and the cold water in which she bathed two chatty babies: her own Anne Harriet and little "Pablito", the son of her hosts, Paul and Betty Popenoe.

The letter moves on to discuss the running of the construction project at the Popenoe house where they were staying and working, and plans for the garden back at Kings Road.

IMAGE 6: First Page of the Letter from the Desert, Marian DaCamara Chace to Pauline Gibling Schindler, September 1922 (ADC/ UCSB).

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: the work is located in archival research into lost voices, specifically that of Marian DaCamara Chace.

I will read you Marian's Letter from the Desert (unpublished archive document)

"S.P.G.:

How is the Schindling?

The desert is scorching, so I trust he is gaining* sufficiently there – still – it is not bad – 96° in the shade is considered temperate here.

But I cant (sic) manage so well without the pump. I forgot it, cant (sic) get one here and cant (sic) manage to get a very large amount without. So if you think best send it along, tho' I seem to have still the old supply. In other words I almost burst. Anne Harriet is as round as an apple and as brown as a date. I've let her get terribly sunburned. Wanted to "harden her" but went a bit too far in the process. She is likely to lose all her skin.

We bathe the youngsters in quite cold water.

Gibbie, the desert is wonderful. I feel as if I were living on the moon [a ? indecipherable]

And we've wonderful moonlight nights of course.

But I wish I could capture some of this desert coloring.

However --- [long dash]

Thank goodness I don't have to describe it as the climate is too warm for impassioned rhetoric.

Anne Harriet & Pablito are carrying on a lively conversation across a space of some fifty yards + we have to separate them ---- ---- ---- [three long dashes]

IMAGE 7: Second Page of the Letter from the Desert, Marian DaCamara Chace to Pauline Gibling Schindler, September 1922 (ADC/ UCSB).

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: the work is located in archival research into lost voices, specifically that of Marian DaCamara Chace.

Continuing Marian's Letter from the Desert (unpublished archive document)

"Now, the business: --- [long dash]

I am mailing a check for \$35⁰⁰ our October "rent" to the Bld. Acct.

And to you, your fathers [sic] check, which if R.M.S will sign and mail --- --- ---
[three dashes]

Our \$35⁰⁰ is not quite sufficient, but the Howensteins \$35⁰⁰ is due [word
crossed out] I suppose, by the time this reaches you – [dash]

Betty and Paul – (particularly Betty) – ask me to request that R.M.S send
possible designs for electric light fixture for the living room - - [two dashes]
well I guess for the whole house, as Betty wishes everything completed
[illegible] Her local carpenter or tinsmith [guess as quite illegible] is to carry
out the designs.

Betty's idea is – [dash]

For material: copper with parchment, or [stencil? illegible] paper or silk
wood || [ditto] || || || || ||

For design – [dash]

in general.

- a bracket arrangement so that light can hang down. She much [?] objects to
a bulb screwed into the wall socket or sticking straight out from the wall. She
wants this (or thinks she does):

[drawing wall bracket]

It will take a person of your unusual intelligence to get the idea from this
[arrow back to drawing]

Personal . Would you [be so? illegible] kind as to ask R.M.S or Carl – or
someone – to get Clyde's trousers + coveralls from that [?miserable? ?Cents
[illegible]] Repair Shop from which I should have

„Karl and Edith Howenstein (above back center) were also friends of the
Schindlers in Chicago where Karl had

also worked at the Art Institute before moving to Los Angeles to become
Director of the Otis Art Institute. The Howensteins first

lived in the Kings Road guest wing for two years between 1922-4.” in
30_Southern California Architectural History/ Pauline Gibling Schindler/
Vagabond Agent for Modernism, 1927-1936.pdf page 3 of 51

**IMAGE 8: Third Page of the Letter from the Desert, Marian DaCamara Chace to Pauline
Gibling Schindler, September 1922 (ADC/ UCSB).**

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: the work is located in archival research into lost
voices, specifically that of Marian DaCamara Chace.

**Continuing Marian's Letter from the Desert (unpublished archive
document)**

“gotten them + didn't [sic]. [SR note – her baby is 4 months old – Clyde could
collect his own trousers + coveralls – is he forgetful? He mentions in one
letter that his memory is not good] It is the one just beyond Crescent on
Santa Monica – Randall + Coats I think – the first one up from Santa Monica –
they will be tossed about + lost by the time we return – about 20¢ is due on
them (for laundering, you know) Put it in the book –

IV

My love to Edith – (and Carl) –
and thanks for the watering.

V

To R.M.S: I am all excited over this desert vegetation. Why not bring a spade
+ shovel when you come down to inspect the Popenoe's house – come in

your car – and dig up enough to plant our place. The mature bamboo here is very beautiful – we could get any amount – and besides, the [illegible] tree, [?mesquite?illegible] and several others here would be just the thing for our place + save us much money at the nurseries – and many water bills.

Come down to inspect, get the plants+ carry us back + we'll share up the expense – this of course we [illegible] be returning long before you can come – [dash]

The house is progressing, slowly, for lack of workmen – only one carpenter + one [..ian illegible] today – Paul has gone hunting but may not find more –

Floor of course is all done – studding up, + most of the roof-frame – Plumbing, + part of the wiring – and one side of ship lap.

Paul or Betty or both mean to write about the design for the light fixtures but asked me to do so officially. The design should of course be very simple.

Clyde is using a wall plug for the higher lights, as well as for the low, or floor plugs –

IMAGE 9: Fourth Page of the Letter from the Desert, Marian DaCamara Chace to Pauline Gibling Schindler, September 1922 (ADC/ UCSB).

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: the work is located in archival research into lost voices, specifically that of Marian DaCamara Chace.

Continuing Marian's Letter from the Desert (unpublished archive document)

“the black rectangular plate, you know, with opening for socket. It is in connection with this that they want the design for bracket.

My greetings to the slab-tilt – et al.

Kim”

IMAGE 10: The House at 835 Kings Road today, with the garden (Image: Sarah Riviere, 2017).

THE ORIGINALITY & SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH: the work is located in archival research into lost voices, specifically that of Marian DaCamara Chace.

WHY / HOW IS THIS AS-YET-UNPUBLISHED LETTER ORIGINAL?

Marian DaCamara Chace's Letter from the Desert reveals the active and as yet unacknowledged role that Marian took on the self-build project from a home at 835 Kings Road. It shows the lives of the two couples—the Chaces and the Schindlers—as being closely intertwined, with their home taking a central position, with creative ideas and questions relating to the shared project flowing freely between them.

Marian's balancing of her management work at the site in the desert, and her plans for the garden of 835 Kings Road back in LA suggest a common project that is being progressed in a collaborative spirit within a sustained and productive exchange.

The letter shows Marian as an active protagonist in the creation of the outside space, with input on the ecological and financial as well as practical sides: the lack of water, their constricted finances and easy sourcing of the plants are all addressed.

However, within two years of this vibrant letter having been penned from the desert, Pauline was struggling with her mental health, and “on 21 June 1924 made an unsuccessful attempt at suicide” (Hines, 2019, p. 52). Soon after, in July 1924, Marian and Clyde Chace left the project with their young family to embark on a new life in Florida. The shared cooperative enterprise at 835 Kings Road had failed.

Rudolf Schinder remained in the house at 835 Kings Road, running his architecture practice from there. It is now a museum.

Significance to the context and aims of my work:

Returning to Donna Haraway’s aim that frames this research, – that we become less deadly on this planet, within her call that we develop an ability to respond / responsibly, to be attuned and to be capable of surprise, I note that all of these involve active presence, engagement, care, and a key aspect of that is enabling and hearing other voices.

Thus, in this paper I raise the lost voice of one co-resident / an unpublished letter that I found in the archive of Rudolf Schindler / architect, which reveals the unacknowledged agency of Marian DaCamara Chase as Rudolf’s co-resident and co-creator (I argue) of the House at 835 Kings Road.

IMPACT: the research thus impacts on wider current discourse in architecture on unassigned and unacknowledged roles in architectural practice, which often become un-thanked and unpaid roles, and thus become unsustainable roles. This paper develops the position that such work has an impact on questions of the agency of the architectural design process. It matters who has a voice in design decisions. It matters that roles are not taken for granted but are titles and acknowledged. It matters, that equitable voice is enabled as part of a design and construction process. As well as in the inhabitation that follows

Returning to the context of Saidiya Hartman’s work on Archival voices, her post-colonial work resists the violence written into archival collections by extending the voices from archival sources to the development of other / parallel narratives through which established ideas can be challenged. Careful historical research into archives, as shown in this paper, can inform the creative practice of new stories, that in turn inform how we design different spaces in which we dwell together

IMAGE 11: THANK YOU!

CONCLUSION / themes have emerged here on VOICE, CARE and resources – specifically those that impact on how we work within the design process, and the impact this may have on the performance of the resulting architecture. THANK YOU! I welcome any questions.

IMAGE 12: REFERENCES

REFERENCES:

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