

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SYLVIA BEACH & THE HOTEL

Sylvia Beach



Sylvia Beach opened Shakespeare and Company on the Left Bank in Paris shortly after WWI and kept it open until the Nazi occupation in WWII.

She would be celebrating her 125th birthday on March 14th (born in 1887 in Baltimore). She grew up in Princeton, New Jersey. Her father, Reverend Sylvester Woodbridge Beach went to Princeton and later was the pastor at the Presbyterian Church for 17 years. Her mother was born to missionaries in India, moved to Pennsylvania and later married her Latin teacher – Reverend Beach.

Sylvia traveled to Paris for the first time with her parents and her two sisters, Holly and Cyprian, when she was 14 in 1901.

She later spent time in Spain and then again returned to Paris in 1917.

She met Adrienne Monnier who ran a small bookshop on the Left Bank. They became good friends and later life partners and in 1919 they decided Sylvia should return to the states and open a "branch" bookstore in New York. The economy was poor and things too expensive in NY so she returned to Paris where her monies would go further.

On Nov. 19, 1919 she opened Shakespeare and Company bookstore and lending library in a former laundry on Rue Dupuytren near Adrienne's shop -- tiny and chock full of pictures, old books, and things like the family "Whitman papers" (poems written on the backs of letters to Walt Whitman that he had scribbled and thrown away).

As it became clear that the shop was just too small, in 1921 Adrienne found a larger antique shop that was for rent with several small rooms to live in, around the corner --Rue de L'Odeon. Again it was called Shakespeare & Co. with a wonderful "French" style portrait of Shakespeare in front. This is where Sylvia met and became close friends with Hemingway and his wife. The bookstore became a hub for Americans coming to Paris. Sylvia received their mail, was a contact point,

and generally made their lives easier. She would let new authors stay in one of the rooms until they were settled. She was friendly with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas for a while. They would share authors, artists, poets and playwrights from all over Europe -- mainly the expatriate Americans coming over in the 20's to be free of the American puritan work ethic. Her first contact with James Joyce was in the summer of 1920. He became a regular subscriber to her lending library. Sylvia's unsung claim to literary history is that she edited and published Joyce's "Ulysses" -- his greatest work. With the help of her sisters, his benefactor, Harriet Weaver, and various authors, many people helped Sylvia to smuggle the book into the US, Canada, and England to bookstores and private buyers. It was considered erotica and banned. She saw little or no monies for her efforts and got little credit.



Sylvia stayed in Paris during WWII and as the German occupation continued, her life became more difficult. She helped all writers and artists who came to the bookstore, giving them shelter and food until they could get out of Paris.

There were few Americans left in Paris at the time and Sylvia was on a watch list. Shakespeare & Co. finally closed in 1941 when a high-ranking German officer came to the bookshop and wanted a first edition of "Finnegan's Wake"; Sylvia refused to sell it to him. He returned several weeks later and said all the books in her shop would be confiscated. She immediately went into action, and with the aide of her concierge and some friends dismantled the whole bookstore down to the fixtures and the sign. If the Germans ever came back, there was nothing to be found. Sylvia, however, was put in an internment camp for 6 months. When she was released she stayed in hiding in Paris until the Liberation. The Germans took their time leaving Paris and there were snipers on the streets and the rooftops around the Left Bank. Hemingway showed up to check in with Sylvia and Adrienne to be sure they were doing all right. When they complained of the snipers, he took a group of his soldiers and took care of the problem. Hemingway then went off to "liberate the Ritz".



Sylvia continued to live in Paris after the war. She never reopened Shakespeare and Company; however, she assisted Joycean scholars as Joyce grew into a major literary figure. She later was able to sell her private Joyce collection to an American university. Sylvia visited the US one more time in 1953 to visit her sister, Holly. She returned to Paris and lived there until her death in 1962. Her partner, Adrienne, had committed suicide in 1955 after a prolonged illness. Sylvia Beach's papers are kept in the archives at Princeton University.

“Although she was a hostess, publisher, book lender, and bookseller, her greatest achievement was as a ‘pump-primer’ who provided access to current and experimental literature; made American works available to the French for reading, translation, and criticism; brought artist and public together; and united artists from a dozen countries.”¹

³ Thank you to Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties & Thirties.for the photos of Sylvia Beach.

¹ Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties & Thirties, Noel Riley Fitch

Sylvia Beach Hotel



In the early 1980's in Portland a group of people were working and chatting at Rimsky Korsakoff House. The mention of some doors from an old Victorian house prompted a conversation about using them in another building. They were being stored in the basement. Things got carried away, as usual, (those creative types!) and Goody Cable, the owner was starting to think about creating a hotel for book lovers, and using the doors!

In 1983-84 Goody and her childhood friend, Sally Ford, were told that the old Gilmore Hotel in Newport was for sale. The history of the building is as interesting as the old doors.



Nye Beach was coming into its heyday in 1910. There was a small boarding house owned by Jacob Wenger and his wife Alice (the Cliff House) located above Nye beach. It had some sleeping rooms and outside area for tents. They sold to DW Wheeler in the fall of 1909. He had moved from the Salem area. He replaced the boarding house with a brand new 3-story building that he had designed and called it the New Cliff House. There were 39 rooms with baths down the hall. It became the honeymoon destination for many years.

Mr. Wheeler operated the hotel until 1920 when he traded the hotel for Peter Gilmore's chicken farm east of Toledo. After the Gilmores took possession of the hotel, Peter wanted" to have chickens in the back lot: Chicken served three times a day. Eggs fresh three times a day. Chicken pot pie Sundays with eggnog." ²

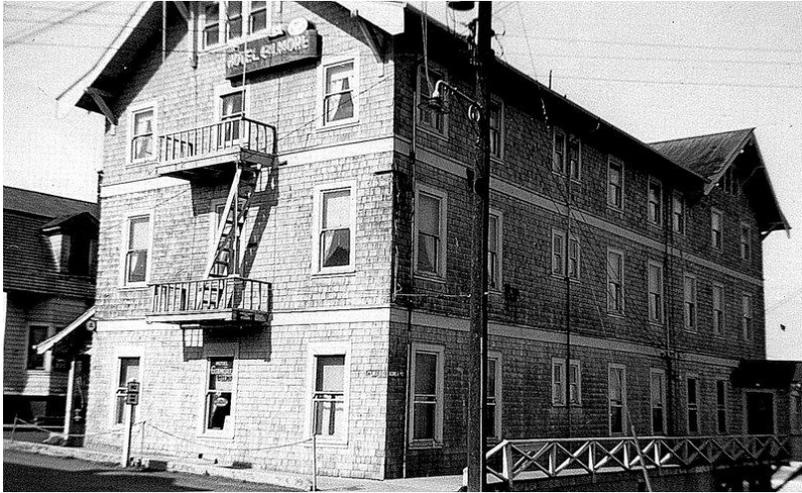
⁴ Thank you to the Lincoln County Historical Society for this photograph.

²Yaquina Bay News, February 24, 1921

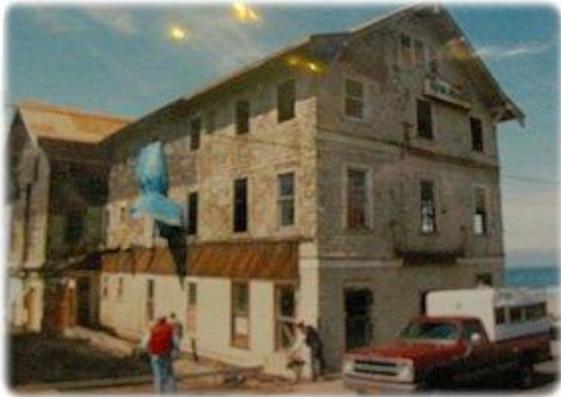


Aunt Cecile
1948

Mr. and Mrs. Gilmore ran the hotel together until 1929 when Mr. Gilmore was killed in a car accident. Mrs. Cecile Gilmore was in the car and injured. Their dog, Pat found a highway crew, led them back to the car, and helped save Mrs. Gilmore. After both their recoveries, Pat worked with Mrs. Gilmore at the hotel, helping deliver mail and newspapers to guests until he died 10 years later. Mrs. Gilmore continued to oversee her customers until 1957. She sold the building to Mr. Donald Young of Portland who owned the Oregon-Willamette Lumber Company with yards in Newport and other areas of Oregon. It is not clear how long he continued to operate the hotel. Sometime in the 1960's it was run as the Greyhound Bus depot. The old hotel was traded for a duplex and a large old house in 1967. A local postman and business owner, Bill Robinson took over the empty unused building. He got it up and running as rooming house – an old hotel with a wonderful view and a waiting list and \$10/week.



In 1984 Mr. Robinson had the building vacated and sold it to the current owners, Goody Cable and Sally Ford.



They spent the next several years clearing it out and with the help of a historical architect, redesigned the interior with fewer rooms and added private baths. They called on family and friends to help fund the project (repaid), and to give time and inspiration to decorate rooms with their favorite author theme. It took several years, however, in February 1987 the doors opened with Ken Peyton, Sally's brother, Goody and Sally manning the desk and welcoming their first customers. Goody had come up with Sylvia Beach's name during her research on another project having run into her name on numerous occasions. So, on March 14th (Sylvia Beach's 100th birthday) a grand opening was planned--many¹ more than the expected 100 people came to see the new building.

That was 25 years ago. People are still coming to look and experience a unique stay listening to the ocean while they read a good book. The doors were never used.



Charlotte Dinolt, Assistant Manager

⁴ Photo of Entrance to Sylvia Beach taken by Andy Davies