

15 Beech Drive
[824 Ocean Avenue]
Dorothy & William Baker
Former Site of The Grange
1951

Many decades ago, before there was a place called Beech Drive, there was an estate road here, no doubt lined with old beech trees. The road led from Ocean Avenue to one of New London's most remarkable homes, known as The Grange. The house as well as the trees are long gone and the estate is forgotten, but the history of 15 Beech Drive brings that story back into focus. This narrative touches on another forgotten aspect of New London's history – New London was once a summer retreat for New York theater people.¹

William Morris Baker (1905-1974), his wife, Dorothy May (Dyer) Baker (1907-1974), and their two children moved to New London from Norwich when William landed the job of street and highway superintendent for the city. William would remain in that position for the next 20 years (Obituary, *The Day* 29 April 1974). In that capacity, he worked closely with Charles P. DeBiasi, Director of Public Works.²

In 1951, the Bakers purchased land on the future Beech Drive from Nunziante Rocco DeBiasi (1889-1973), Charles' brother. Rocco was a well known figure in the Italian American community and owner of Rudolph's Beauty Salon on Meridian Street (1927-1970), more recently known as "Nancy's." Rocco was a popular guitarist and band leader. He and his wife, Rose (Mariani) DeBiasi, lived at 19 Pratt Street.

Exactly when the Bakers moved into their new home is not clear. Although Rocco DeBiasi did not get city approval for his 11-lot subdivision on Beech drive until May 1953 (*The Day*, 05 May 1953), he evidently sold property to the Bakers and others

¹ Estate roads may be made out on the 1934 aerial view available through the Connecticut State Library: See, <https://cslib.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4005coll10/id/1348>. One old Beech remains at the back of 15 Beech Drive, behind the fence across from the school. America's greatest actor of the 1800s is often said to have been Edwin Booth (1833-1893), who owned property on New London's Alewife Cove (sold in 1871). Booth probably came to New London at the urging of the NYC theater impresario, William Stewart (aka Stuart, alias O'Flaherty), who owned what today is Ocean Beach Park. There were other actors too, less well known. This was all about the same time that James O'Neill started acquiring property in New London. The Mansfields were relative late comers.

² Among their projects together was the effort to save New London's elm trees from Dutch elm disease. Massive spraying with DDT failed to save the trees in New London or elsewhere.

before that date.³ DiBiasi envisioned Beech Drive as a U-shaped street. The southerly arm of the U is now the bus driveway for the Nathan Hale Magnet school at 37 Beech Drive, which was built 1969-70.⁴

The Bakers also purchased other tracts from DeBiasi. Their address remained 824 Ocean Avenue (now non-existent) for many years, and in fact no such street as Beech Drive appears in New London city directories even in its final year of publication, 1965. Both Mr and Mrs Baker passed away in 1974.

It is clear from the property transfer in 1974 that the Bakers owned 3 tracts, including the house. Perhaps they purchased the extra lots to prevent their development or simply as an investment. The Bakers' adult children, William C. Baker and Doris Ann Whitehill, sold the house and lots in August 1976. An advertisement for the house ran in *The Day*:

Beautiful Ranch, living room, fire place, dining area, kitchen, 3 charming bedrooms, 1½ baths, garage, very immaculate, large lots, beautifully landscaped, immediate occupancy \$43,900" (11 June 1976).

The next owner of the house was Sophie Ushkevich (1921-2011), a clerk-secretary at the Groton submarine base for many years and a member of the Civil Services Union. Sophie was the daughter of Stephen and Elena (Kononchik) Ushkevich. Stephen was a Longshoreman at the Victory yard of Electric Boat when he passed away in March 1944. Sophie was involved in many volunteer activities over her entire life and in her later years was particularly active at L&M Hospital. She was a graduate of the Williams Memorial Institute (1941). Serendipitously, Sophie had long ago attended the Nathan Hale grammar school when it was located at Williams and Lincoln Avenue. She would continue to live next door to a new school of the same name for the rest of her life.

The house came to Sophie's great niece, Nicole A. O'Connor, by way of Nicholas Ushkevich, Jr. (1948-2017), Nicole's father. Thus the house has been in the same family

³ Another sale in 1951 from DiBiasi was to Minnie Rutman for the lot on which the house at 826 Ocean Avenue was built, on the south corner of Beech. The house was constructed a home in 1952. Estimated cost was \$7,000 (*The Day* 09 Feb. 1952). That address remains the same today, as does 814 Ocean, on the north corner of Beech. The latter house has not been documented by NLL but is listed as built in 1950 by the City Assessor. Only two other lots on Beech Drive have been developed: No. 16 and No. 20, raised ranches built in the early 1970s. It appears that the extra lots acquired by the Bakers and sold to Miss Ushkevich were originally intended for development accessed from the south arm of Beech Drive.

⁴ Proposals for the new public school were received 20 Jan. 1969. Named in honor of Captain Nathan Hale, a young Revolutionary War hero who briefly taught in New London in 1774-5, the school at Beech Drive replaced an earlier Nathan Hale School at Williams and Lincoln Avenue.

for nearly fifty years.⁵

We were unable to document precisely how DeBiasi acquired the land at what today is 15 Beech, but earlier research shows that it must have come through property left to Harold Van Doren of Philadelphia, the heir of Susan (Hegeman) Mansfield, also known by her stage name, Beatrice Cameron.⁶ Starting around 1900, Susan and her world-famous actor husband, Richard Mansfield, owned most of the property in this vicinity, east of Ocean Avenue, including today's Beech Drive, the northern portion of the Nathan Hale School property, and houses and land north of it and east to Lester Street. The Mansfield property included several houses still extant (802, 802R, and 798 Ocean).

The Mansfields' main house was known as The Grange, with the address of 826 Ocean Avenue, located about where 15 Beech Drive is today. Before the Mansfields, the entire area belonged to members of an old New London family, the Gardners.

The Mansfield' palatial house had originally been built by Noel Byron Gardner. Though much altered by the Mansfields, at its core was a house built about 1875. The Grange, as it was named by the Mansfields, was torn down in 1941, a year after Susan Mansfield's death, in order to make the property more palatable to investors interested in subdivision development. The demolition also made the area more accessible for building a new public school, long anticipated in this vicinity. According to *The Day* (12 June 1941):

Mansfield Home In Ocean Avenue Is Being Razed – The old home of Richard Mansfield, the actor, at 826 Ocean avenue, is being torn down. Permission to raze the structure was obtained today by Atty. Philip Z. Hankey, representing the Mansfield estate. The building has been vacant since Mrs Mansfield died about a year ago. Contents of the house were sold some time ago at a public auction.

The Mansfields

Before movies, Richard Mansfield (1853-1907) was America's foremost dramatic star, New London's James O'Neill (1847-1920) notwithstanding. Some called Mansfield the greatest living character actor. Others said he was the best impersonator of

⁵ Sophie saved her mother, Mrs. Nicholas Ushkevich, from a two-alarm fire on Oct. 16, 1957, in their apartment at 146 North Bank St., next door to a bakery at Douglass Street. *The Day*, 17 Oct. 1957.

⁶ Harold Van Doren to Nunziata Rocco DeBiasi (02/25/1945), WD, 223/384: A very large irregular piece of land bounded West by Ocean (249), South by DeSimone et al (596), extending to Lester with 65 feet of frontage and bordering North & East by Olsen and North by Cecil Brown and Verkade and Brouwer. According to *The Day* (19 Ap 1945), a right of way in property at Ocean avenue and Lester street was conveyed by William Z. And Madeline S. White to Harold Van Doren of Philadelphia, who conveys title to the tract to Nunziante Rocco DeBiasi.

Shakespeare's Henry V and Richard III of all time. Mansfield was raised and educated in England, where he also acted in the early part of his career before coming to New York and the touring life of the leader of a theater company. Americans liked his British accent, his elocution, but most of all his ability to embody character and portray emotion. He had a huge stage presence. Critics liked to say, "There are good actors, bad actors, and Richard Mansfield."⁷

Today, this once most famous resident of Ocean Avenue, New London, is all but forgotten. It is unfortunate he died at age 54, just missing the era of moving pictures. James O'Neill's son, Eugene, became a world-famous playwright, and both father and son are accordingly well remembered in New London today. Richard Mansfield's promising and handsome son, Gibbs, who wanted to be an actor and a writer, died while in training as an army pilot during World War I. Indeed, one has to wonder, had it not been for Eugene O'Neill's tremendous accolades, would his actor father now be as little known as Richard Mansfield?

At the height of his career in 1900, Richard Mansfield decided that New London would become his permanent home base, having summered here on and off for years. It seemed the ideal place to settle with his wife and son, Gibbs Mansfield (1898-1918). Finally, in December of 1900, Susan Mansfield began acquiring contiguous properties on the east side of Ocean Avenue, properties that had belonged to the Gardner family for generations.

One of these was an estate that Richard dubbed The Grange (demolished in 1941). Next door to the north, the Mansfields bought an early 18th-century farmhouse called by tradition, the Old Homestead, today one of the oldest houses surviving in New London. Soon afterwards, west of the Old Homestead, the Mansfield built Appletree Cottage, an Arts-and-Crafts style gardener's cottage with greenhouse (now a garage), today's 798 Ocean Avenue. Beyond that was another building, first called the Studio and later used as a garage, now 802R Ocean Avenue, the home of the Olsen family for several generations. In 1905 Susan bought an additional farm estate on the west side of Ocean Avenue at 715, which property would later become apartments known as Seven Acres. The house survives today along with its carriage house, also now apartments.⁸

The Mansfields' townhouse in Manhattan at 316 Riverside Drive overlooking the

⁷ Mansfield introduced many firsts to the American stage. His adaptation of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* in 1887 was a phenomenal success. His *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1898) was also the first American production and was very popular. He also introduced George Bernard Shaw's plays as well as Ibsen's to the American stage.

⁸ In the 1920s, 715 Ocean became apartments known as Seven Acres, by which time part of the estate had been subdivided for tract housing.

Hudson was long a favorite meeting spot for theater people, the scene of many soirees, dramatic readings, and high-spirited literary debates. "The entertainments at The Grange became as famous as those at his townhouse In all points [Richard Mansfield] lived the life of a country gentleman," according to one of his biographers, Paul Wilstach.⁹ When Mansfield died on 31 August 1907, the *New York Times* observed that his real estate in New London "forms the most extensive holdings of any one summer resident" (31 Aug. 1907).

The Gardners

In 1851, after the death of their father, Benjamin Gardner, Jr., his six surviving offspring inherited farm properties lining Town Hill Road (today's Ocean Avenue). Gardner was a prosperous New London grocer who held onto his outlying farms in order to supply his customers with fresh produce and dairy items. Soon after his death, his adult children began building new homes for themselves on Ocean and Montauk Avenues, and selling or leasing others to the summer people of the Pequot Colony.

One of Benjamin's sons, George Harris Gardner (1828-1912), was a farmer and fisherman who with his son, Walter Gardner, built a house in 1902 at 813 Ocean Avenue, having sold off his share of the patrimony. This house survives, as does the one next door at 821 Ocean, built in 1903 by another sibling, Horace Gardner and his son, Horace R. Gardner. Another brother, Noel Byron Gardner (1830-1895), is listed as a farmer on Ocean Avenue. There was also William B. Gardner (1836-1917), who had numerous businesses, including moving and storage and house painting, but he was never a farmer. He lived at 21 Truman Street. Stephen Gardner (1840-1911) had a farm at what today is 749 Ocean Avenue. The only girl in the family was Minerva, a dressmaker, who married boat captain and yacht builder, William Burdick. In retirement in the 1920s, the couple moved from 21 Truman Street to 771 Montauk.

One source of information on the Gardners is the *Genealogical & Biographical Record of New London County*, published by J.H. Beers in 1905. The listing for Noel B. Gardner says that besides farming, he developed a grading and excavating business in the Pequot Colony and built a "beautiful home on Ocean Avenue, which was purchased in 1900 by Richard Mansfield, the actor" (p. 453). Noel Gardner built a French Second Empire villa immediately south of the Gardner family's Old Homestead, likely sometime after his marriage in 1866 to Sarah Daniels, a home that later became the

⁹ *Richard Mansfield, the Man and the Actor* by Paul Wilstach (1909) p. 372. The site of the present 315 Riverside Drive was originally occupied by four houses numbered 314, 315, 316 and 317, five-story row houses built in 1897 by Alonzo B. Knight (1864-1923), an architect and builder. The Mansfields bought their townhouse in October 1898, two months after the birth of their son. As with all their real estate, title was vested solely in Mrs. Mansfield. See, www.bloomingtondale.org, West 104 Newsletter, May 2018.

Mansfields' Grange. The house was located about mid-way down what today is Beech Drive as it enters the school parking lot.

Susan Mansfield received word from her New London real estate agent, William S. Chappell, in a letter dated 24 Oct. 1900, that the sale of Ocean Avenue property from the Gardners and also from another farmer, William L. Lester, was all set. The note makes it clear that the next property south, owned by Francis E. Riggs, was already under construction, with carpenters and teams of men busy grading the lot and preparing the site. Chappell wrote that he had told the architect, Mr. Hazeltine, to contact Susan as soon as possible. The implication is that the same architect that the Riggs had employed would soon be working for the Mansfield. Both of these summertime mansions were demolished to make way for housing and a school.¹⁰



The "Old Homestead." New York Public Library Archives. Not to be reproduced.

According to the *New York Times*, the Mansfields' first purchase in New London was The Old Homestead (802 Ocean Avenue). We know from property research by Tom Couser that this old house, before being purchased by the Mansfields, was owned jointly by the Gardner heirs. According to *The Day*, the Mansfields made "extensive improvements" to the old gambrel, located within ear-shot of The Grange. The Grange was considered "one of the finest places in that section."¹¹ It is

worth mentioning that in colonial times, Town Hill Road (today's Ocean Avenue) terminated at this old house. The area was known as Brown's Gate, Brown being the 17th-century owner, prior to the Gardners.¹²

¹⁰ The Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room for Rare Books and Manuscripts, Archives, The New York Public Library, Box 8, Mansfield-Beatrice (Susan) Business Letters. Referenced below as NY Public Library Archives. William Saltonstall Chappell (1847-1937) was from an old New London family, very successful lumber and coal dealers in the later 19th century. William was an insurance and real estate broker. Louis R. Hazeltine was a principal in Donnelly & Hazeltine, 1899-1906, responsible for the design of numerous public buildings and private homes in the area and beyond, notably the New London Savings Bank and the Congregational Church of Groton. For an illustration of Hazeltine's own house in Post Hill section of New London, see *Picturesque New London*. Hazeltine left for the West Coast perhaps even before 1906. The design for the Rev. Chapman's brick mansion at 917 Ocean (1914) must have been done before Hazeltine's departure or done entirely by Dudley St. Clair Donnelly.

¹¹ *The Day*, Friday afternoon 30 August 1907, Obituary for Richard Mansfield.

¹² The Old Homestead has yet to be documented.

The Old Homestead was (and is) a quaint, modest farmhouse, unceremoniously close to the street, blanketed with the blooms of old flowers every spring. There is no room for a circular drive here, nor was there a view of Long Island Sound from the old house. But Susan Mansfield also acquired acreage and the house immediately to the south, The Grange, which had plenty of room for a circular drive, gardens, and, being on a small rise, afforded a broad view over the seaside-end of New London. She gathered property south and east of The Grange, including what today is the Nathan Hale School property and over to Lester Street, where the Mansfield' stable was located. To the south, the Mansfields' property bordered the estate developed by Mrs Francis E. Riggs.¹³ The view to the north from The Grange would have been of the Old Homestead. By the end of 1903, Susan also acquired property on either side of Appletree Lane, a private road that leads east along the north side of the Old Homestead and is across from where Niles Hill Road joins Ocean Avenue.¹⁴

Despite all of this real estate activity, Richard Mansfield had long talked of acquiring a cottage in the English countryside. In the winter of 1902 he wrote his friend and future biographer, William Winter, that his wife would soon be sailing for England to scout out real estate there.

It is to be a cottage, all our own, where love and comfort and a modest competency are to attend our declining days – without regard to the nobility and gentry of the neighborhood. . . . If you'll come to us in England, we will arrange to write 'The

¹³ The impressive stone walls of "Fareham," Mrs Francis E. Riggs's summer estate still surround part of Nathan Hale School, with the old street number "858" still visible. Her husband, Elisha Francis Riggs (1851-1910), was "a Washington millionaire" who died in New London, according to his obituary in the *Norwich Bulletin* (7 July 1910). The story implies that the "magnificent mansion" had been built about 1906 [actually about 1900] but that the Riggs had been coming to the Pequot for 20 summers before then. E.F. Riggs was a scion of a famous banking family. His wife was Medora Thayer Riggs (1852-1915). His son, Col. Elisha Francis Riggs, was in charge of the police in Puerto Rico when he was assassinated by Nationalists in 1936. Another son, Thomas Lawrason Riggs, occupied the NL address in the 1920s, was a playwright and later a priest. By 1930, the address was occupied by stock broker John Wilbur (1887-1948). In 1940 it was vacant. In 1945 it was occupied by Philip A. Batchker, another broker. By 1950 it was home of widow, Mrs Madeline Heroy Woodward (1879-1970). The city purchased Woodward's property, 4 acres, by eminent domain for \$112,000 in 1968. Apparently there was a friendly agreement that the house would be used as a school, but if not, if it had to be demolished, that the new school would be of similar architectural style. This, apparently, was why the school was NOT built on the Woodward acreage but ended up on the northerly parcels, with only a playground and fields on the former Fareham site. The city purchased three other parcels in addition to Woodward's: Kirschenbaun, Olsen, and 3 acres from Peter-Paul Builders. See, *The Day*, 02 Ap 1968.

¹⁴ Tom Couser estimates that altogether Susan acquired property equivalent to 792, 802, 802R, 814, 798 Ocean and 16 and 20 Beech Drive as well as the northern sections of the Nathan Hale School property.

Humorous Life of Mansfield,' by an Eye-Witness. My love to you, – R.M.¹⁵

Richard soon joined Susan in England, and upon their return to New London in late summer 1902, they settled at The Grange. According to the actor's other biographer, Paul Wilstach, Richard had purchased the Grange for his wife the summer before, had it "improved" during their absence, and then presented it to her as a surprise. Judging from letters and documents, however, it seems unlikely that anything of this sort came as a surprise to Susan Mansfield, who handled the couple's real estate financial affairs.¹⁶

To say that the Mansfield considerably altered The Grange would be an understatement. Its size and style changed dramatically, "until," according to biographer, Paul Wilstach, "it lost the last vestige of its original identity . . ." To the east, a grand wing with "colonial" facade, Ionic pilasters, and wrap-around porches was added. The porches afforded a view of Long Island Sound.



The Grange, viewed from the southeast. The mansard roofed section (at left) is the earlier part of the house. The large "colonial" addition with deep wrap-around porches, faced a small building that Richard Mansfield called "Rose Cottage." Out of view on the other side of the house was picturesque Old Homestead.

¹⁵ Since the plan for a modest cottage in England failed to materialize, perhaps the Mansfields decided on the next best thing: a cottage on their New London property.

¹⁶ Deed research by Tom Couser shows that the property was purchased in Susan's name in September 1901. The story that Richard Mansfield bought the Grange unbeknownst to Susan and had it fixed up and furnished during the family's absence in England is an example of the actor's creativity as a story-teller. The numerous large estates along Ocean Avenue all had names. "The Grange" is unusual in U.S. but was among the most popular house names in the U.K. It derives from an old term for a monastic farm. "Thrushcross Grange" is from Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. New England's version of an English country estate is located in Lincoln, Ma., the Codman estate, known as The Grange, now a house museum open to the public.

Susan Mansfield

After the premature deaths of her husband and son, Susan suffered from perennial bouts of depression as is evident in correspondence with close friend, Anna Hempstead Branch (1875-1937), well known poet and New London native. Anna was the last resident of the old Hempstead House (1678), now a museum house in New London. The two spent time in Switzerland together, and they shared many interests, including historic preservation, poetry, and spiritualism. Branch was a chronic optimist and must have been an encouraging companion for Susan, whom she always called Beatrice. The two knew each other for many years, even before Susan first came to New London.

After World War I, Susan tried to bury her grief by doing war relief work. In July 1920, she wrote to Branch from Jerusalem: "Beloved Anna." She had gone to the Holy Land to help run an orphanage on almost no money. ". . . all things weary me unutterably . . . I must find God," Susan wrote. "I doubt now if I ever [will] come [home] unless obliged to by business.... How can I? Can I sit down and rest in his house? Oh, Anna, Anna, what have I done to suffer so?" But Susan did come home, as her material affairs demanded she must, and in November 1922, she wrote Branch from New York: "I want to go – far far away –." ¹⁷

New London's poet laureate, Branch attended school in Brooklyn and New York, and after graduating from Smith College in 1897, she attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York. There she certainly would have crossed paths with the the Mansfields, if she had not already. The New York Public Library archives includes Branch's published poem, "Charm," written in honor of the Mansfields' 13th wedding anniversary in 1905.

Susan tried to sell both The Grange and Seven Acres before World War I. An advertisement in *Vanity Fair* in 1915 lists The Grange, New London, for rent, furnished, or for sale. The house is described as large with extensive grounds, paneled black oak, nine bedrooms and seven bathrooms, along with seven servants' rooms with a bath. "Beautiful view of the Sound." *Town & Country* ran a similar display ad. Judging from correspondence, Susan often stayed at the Mohican Hotel rather than at The Grange, indicating that perhaps it had been rented, whatever her published address was.

When Susan finally sold Seven Acres (715 Ocean Avenue) in September 1916, it had been on the market for years, as had The Grange. The following advertisement for The Grange ran in the *Norwich Bulletin* in 1914 (Oct. 5): "For Sale – New London, Conn. The Grange. Property of Mrs Richard Mansfield. Large colonial House, 9 masters' bedrooms, five bathrooms, large living room 30 x 30 feet, dining room Extensive

¹⁷ Anna Hempstead Branch collection, Linda Lear Center for Special Collections & Archives, Connecticut College, New London, CT

grounds, garage with living rooms. Will sacrifice much below cost." No offers were recorded.

In the 1920s, Susan began working with realtor Janie L. Edgar (1861-1928), who was the first female member of the New London Chamber of Commerce (circa 1913). She was the granddaughter of a whaling captain, Capt. Parker Smith. In 1921 Miss Edgar wrote Susan's New York attorney, William A. Evans, that Mr and Mrs Howell, who had been renting both the Old Homestead and Appletree Cottage had decided against purchasing any of the properties. Miss Edgar observed that everyone now wanted waterfront property.¹⁸

Another possible buyer for the Old Homestead was Mrs Frederick Palmer, a wealthy widow, who was offered the property at \$100/month including "portable" garage immediately behind the house. The selling price at the time was \$15,000. Though nothing came of it, this possibility is significant because Mrs Palmer's son, Frederic C. Palmer, Jr., was the restoration architect who later was in charge of turning the Joshua Hempstead House (1678) into a museum house. If Palmer had been involved in the Old Homestead, its current state of preservation might be very different than it is today.¹⁹

Finally, the Old Homestead was purchased in 1923 by local a banker, Henry Holt Smith, who offered Susan \$10,000 for it, saying (according to letters) that he would need to spend \$2,000 in repairs. Smith soon afterwards renovated the Homestead and sold to William and Madeline White. The old gambrel remained the Whites' home for many decades thereafter. The Mansfield' barn and property on Lester Street also sold in 1923.

Richard Mansfield had been a compulsive collector, and though he made a lot of money, he also spent it with abandon. A major auction of his collected art and furniture was held by the American Art Association in New York in March 1908. The proceeds were disappointing. Still, a number of the paintings that can be traced are today in major museums, including the National Gallery.

When in Connecticut, Susan gave readings and performed famous scenes for schools in the region. In 1916 she produced a version of *Old Heidelberg* at New London's Lyceum on 26 August. There were also numerous "Beatrice" programs to raise money for the Red Cross. She was a leader of New London's Equal Franchise League in 1918

¹⁸ Susan rented out the Old Homestead at 802 Ocean Avenue from 1919 to 1922 to banker, Frank J. Howell. Howell built his own house at 960 Ocean in 1922-23. The studio, later referred to as a garage, is what became 802R, transformed into a home by Tobias Olsen, contractor.

¹⁹ Mary (Brennan) Palmer (1867-1943) was the second wife of Frederic Courtland Palmer (1844-1914), manufacturer of comforters and bedspreads. Frederic C. Palmer Jr's own restored home in East Haddam with his collection of furnishings is now a museum administered by Connecticut Landmarks, as are the Hempsted Houses in New London.

along with Miss Edna Tyler (*Norwich Bulletin* 25 Nov 1916). A local chapter of a children's aid organization was known as the Beatrice Sunshine Society, named in her honor. She often helped the group raise money for children's hospitals and similar causes, and she helped produce plays at Connecticut College.

For a number of years, Connecticut College also hosted an exhibit on the dramatic career of Richard Mansfield, using props, works of art, and photos loaned by Susan. Finally the exhibit ended and was sent to Yale Library in 1933, but it was kept there for only a few months before it was returned to New London. Perhaps it was publicity about the exhibit that inspired a burglary at The Grange soon after the collection's return.

Still unable to sell The Grange, Susan began to think about using the house to accommodate a theater company, a revival of the Mansfield Players, according to the *New York Times* (20 Oct. 1925). Susan even returned to the stage, heading the players to give a week's engagement in New Haven performing Barry's *You and I*. According to news accounts, they next performed *The Goose Hangs High* at the Lyceum in their home center of New London. They also performed in other Connecticut cities, including New Britain and Bristol. Susan's address in city directories remained 826 Ocean Avenue, The Grange, until her death in 1940. The house can be made out under a pasted-over patch in the 1921- 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, image 77.

In February 1926 Susan was honored at a luncheon at the opening of the Mansfield Theater in New York's theater district.²⁰ In 1928 she was a speaker at the annual dinner of the New York Centre of the Drama League, where Eugene O'Neill was named one of the greatest living playwrights, along with Shaw and Pirandello. During the 1930s, Susan was often in New York teaching speech and drama, directing plays and giving readings at the Christodora House on New York's Lower East Side, where Anna Hempstead Branch had founded the Poets' Guild.²¹ Susan was a popular lecturer at Christodora, alongside Nicholas Vachel Lindsay and Branch. The 1930 New York City Directory lists Susan as a lodger at 59 West 46th Street.

Still unable to sell her remaining New London real estate, Susan decided it should be subdivided into small building lots, retaining the Grange for herself. An undated plan for this concept was made, and she did manage to sell off a few small parcels in the 1930s.

In 1936 she transferred Appletree Cottage and other property to an old family

²⁰ Located at 256-262 West 47th Street, the theater was renamed the Brooks Atkinson Theater in 1960.

²¹ The Christodora Settlement House operated from 1897 to 1948 at 163 Avenue B, New York, near Tompkins Square. A new building was erected there in 1928, now luxury condos. The organization, which provides enrichment program for poor children and teens, continues to operate.

25-50¢ per person” With Susan as “Resident Regent” whenever she happened to be in New London, it was sure to be a draw. “I cannot bear the thought of such an historic place being raised . . .,” concluded her correspondent.”²⁴

In April 1938, Susan got word that a junior college of business for young men was considering moving to New London and might be interested in leasing The Grange for two years, with an option to buy. The lease would start in early summer for \$150 to \$200 per month, but the rent would not start until the fall, after the school had commenced (and tuition collected). The mentioned sales price was \$18,000. Susan’s handwritten memo on the letter: “They came – Nothing doing.”²⁵

Later in 1938, Susan may have felt renewed hope when she received word that the national organization of the Phi Beta, then an arts organization for women, was considering acquiring her property as a national headquarters.²⁶ What happened to that proposal was not discovered. Next came a letter dated 7 February 1939 from her New London attorney, in which she learned that the New London Board of Education might be interested in buying her Ocean Avenue property for \$18,000 for a new elementary school.²⁷ This, of course, is what happened, but not during Susan’s lifetime and not with The Grange still standing.

In July 1940 Susan stayed at the Hotel Wellington near Columbus Circle, New York, before returning to New London for the last time. Susan Hegeman Mansfield died of a heart attack at The Grange, New London, on 12 July 1940, aged 71. More than a hundred people attended the funeral service, with floral tributes sent



Mansfield & Cameron, 1887, photogravure, Gloucester & Lady Ann in Richard III.

²⁴ 31 July 1937, From Henry Woodhouse of the World Economic & Monetary Conference, New York, N.Y. NYPL archives.

²⁵ 25 April 1938, Letter from Alling, Lincoln & Prentis, Inc. General Insurance, New London, CT to Mrs Richard Mansfield, Hotel Algonquin, West 44 Street, New York, NY. NYPL archives.

²⁶ 23 April 1938, Letter from the National Phi Beta, to Susan Mansfield. NYPL Archives.

²⁷ NYPL archives.

15 Beech Drive

from many parts of America and Europe. The Mansfields are buried in the nearby cemetery on Ocean Avenue known as Gardners' Yard.

It seems ironic, with thousands of schools, dozens of statues, a historic house museum, and two colonial-era schoolhouse museums in the U.S. dedicated to "the Martyr Spy of the Revolution," Nathan Hale, that there is not a single school or theater named for the Mansfield – even an arts magnet school on the very site of his former New London estate. Indeed, the only vestige of the Mansfield name in New London today is a short subdivision street, Mansfield Road, off of Ocean near Mansfield's Seven Acres.

The narrative above starts with title information researched by Tom Couser together with other properties we have researched over many years. We have used primary and secondary sources, including census records, city directories, newspaper accounts, cemetery and military service records, and letters. This is by no means exhaustive research but is meant to give an idea of the people involved in the history of this property.

– Mary Beth Baker for New London Landmarks, August 29, 2024.

Some additional sources:

Paul Wilstach, *Richard Mansfield, the Man and the Actor* (1909).

William Winter, *The Life and Art of Richard Mansfield* (1910).

Among Mansfield's published works are *Don Juan*, a play (1891), *Blown Away* (1897) a nonsensical narrative without rhyme or reason, illustrated by the author, and *The Richard Mansfield Acting Version of King Henry V* (1901).

A major spread on the actor was published in the Sunday *NYT*, 1 Sept 1907.

The NY Public Library contains the Mansfield family archives. <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/1863#c177883>

American Society for Psychical Research Letters & Transcripts, (with gaps) 1907-1936

Letters from James Hylsop, secretary of the society, to Beatrice Mansfield and transcripts of spiritual sittings arranged to make contact with Richard Mansfield.

Legal Papers, Financial Records, Address Books 1890-1940

Mortgages, wills, bonds, contracts, check book stubs, address books, etc.
1895-1940

Also includes drawings and blueprints of The Grange, the Mansfield's New London, Connecticut estate

<http://archives.nypl.org/mss/1863#c177889>

Gustav Kobbe, *Famous Actors & Their Homes* (1903) has photos of the Mansfield in New London but no narrative about it.