

Famous Floridians: Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway's writings and his personal life had a great influence on American writers. Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature. Hemingway chose Key West, Florida for his home.

As a boy near Chicago, Hemingway was taught by his father to hunt and fish. He became a sporting man, a man who could survive in nature. Throughout his life he had a love of hunting, fishing, and adventure. He drew heavily on those experiences in his writing.

Hemingway began his writing career as a reporter. He left that job within a few months to serve as an American Red Cross ambulance driver during World War I. Despite a boyhood eye injury that prevented him from fighting, Hemingway entered danger as deeply as he could. His war experiences also provided material for much of his fiction.

After the war, Hemingway served as a war correspondent and then settled in Paris. Hemingway heard about Key West from a friend. On the way back from Paris, he stopped at the tiny Florida island. He soon discovered that life in remote Key West was like living in a foreign country while still perched on



Ernest Hemingway at work.

the southernmost tip of America. Hemingway loved it. "It's the best place I've ever been anytime, anywhere, flowers, tamarind trees, guava trees, coconut palms...."

Hemingway spent long periods of time in Key West, and in Spain and Africa. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), he returned to Spain as a newspaper correspondent. He loved Spain and bullfighting—most anything that made his heart pound. In World War II he again was a correspondent and later was a reporter for the Army.

Hemingway was one of the most noted authors to focus on the time between the two world wars. He wrote about two types of people. One type, disillusioned by war, lived for their own interests and needs. The other type consisted of men of simple character, such as prizefighters and bullfighters. Hemingway wrote of their courageous battles. A number of his books have been made into movies. In

1952, Hemingway published *The Old Man and the Sea*. It was about an old Cuban fisherman. The old man had not been catching much. This time he caught a huge fish. He battled for the fish with sharks. Hemingway won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for this short novel. In 1954, he won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Hemingway wrote, “Each book should be a new beginning where he (the author) tries again for something that is beyond attainment.” Ernest Hemingway, the adventurer, approached life that way.

Today over 40 descendents of Hemingway cats live at his former home.

Key West

Our knowledge of Key West’s colorful past begins with its discovery by Ponce de Leon in 1513. The island was first known as Cayo Hueso (Isle of Bones) because it was littered with remains from an Indian battlefield or burial ground. “Key West” is the English version of the Spanish term.

In the early days, the “Keys” or “small islands” were exchanged back and forth between Spain and England. In 1821, the Keys, with all of Florida, became part of American territory.

In 1822, the Navy first established a presence in Key West. The Navy was charged with ridding the area of pirates. The city grew and prospered, based first on fishing and salvaging ships wrecked on nearby reefs, and later on cigar manufacturing. By 1890, Key West was the largest and richest city in Florida, but after the turn of the century, it was in decline.

In the early 1900s, the “Overseas Highway” was constructed to Key West. Today, it consists of 126 miles of road, with over 40 bridges connecting the tiny islands.

Visitors to Key West can discover a past of pirates, treasure hunters, and a rich military presence. They can visit the Ernest Hemingway home and museum. The colonial style mansion is where he wrote many of his most important works.

