



12 May 2017

PRESS RELEASE

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TRANSFER OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S FINAL RESIDENCE,  
IN THE MIDDLE OF IDAHO, MARKS A NEW APPROACH  
TO THE ICONIC WRITER'S LEGACY IN THE AMERICAN WEST

The ownership of Ernest Hemingway's final home shifts from The Nature Conservancy to The Community Library in Ketchum, Idaho, this month. The change marks a new approach to the preservation and promotion of the iconic writer's legacy in the American West, and by a library whose own history is intertwined with Hemingway's.

For the past thirty years, the house, and its associated 13.9 acres of land alongside the Big Wood River, has been managed by the Conservancy. In 2015, the house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, both for its association with the great writer, and also because it is an exquisite example of mid-century architecture in the Sun Valley, Idaho, area.

Now the house will be incorporated into a larger historical and literary program that will explore Hemingway's abiding connections to the remote and rugged region, a place he visited for two decades, and the place where he turned to make his final home after his departure from Cuba.

The house will remain private. It will be the site of a new residency program for writers, scholars, and artists. An apartment of the house will be renovated in the coming months for the new residency program, which is planned to begin in early 2018. Artifacts from the house will be integrated into the Library's regional history collection, and they will be made accessible to the public through periodic displays at the Library and its associated museum, as well as through research requests.

"It seems clear to me – from the stories that still float among long-time locals, as well as from Hemingway's correspondence – that Idaho provided a kind of center of gravity for Hemingway. It's a place he kept coming back to, and he developed enduring friendships in the local community. He socialized with Gary Cooper here, but he also hunted with the local sports shop manager and the ski lift operator," said Jenny Emery Davidson, the Library's executive director. "But his story here has remained somewhat spectral. Now we have the opportunity to explore that story more intentionally, and to raise the profile of literature in the heart of the West."

In preparing to take ownership of the house, the Library has developed a multi-faceted program to honor Hemingway's legacy and to elevate literature in the Idaho landscape that he loved. The Hemingway Legacy Initiative is anchored by the new residency program, and it also includes increased preservation efforts to grow the Hemingway archive; development of new educational outreach materials, including a virtual tour of the house; the launch of an annual distinguished lecture in Ketchum each July (the month that marks the anniversary of Hemingway's birth and death); and an annual Hemingway seminar in September. The Library is engaged in a campaign to

raise at least \$1.5 million for the ongoing sustainability of the house and the Initiative of which it is a part. A lead gift from the Carr Foundation made the transfer possible.

The development of the historical and literary program materialized through a two-year planning process between the Conservancy and the Library, beginning in the fall of 2014. The Conservancy was looking to develop a long-term plan for the historical house, which has not fit neatly within its conservation mission. The Library was ready to give fresh attention to its existing Hemingway collection and to situate it in a broader context. By 2016, a plan emerged to transfer the house from the Conservancy to the Library as part of the larger Hemingway Legacy Initiative.

Hemingway shot himself in the house on July 2, 1961, and he is buried in the nearby cemetery. His wife, Mary, continued to own and spend significant time in the house until her own death in 1986, when she bequeathed the house and property to the Conservancy, stating simply that she wanted it preserved as a “nature reference library.”

Ernest’s son Jack had worked with the Conservancy years earlier to protect the nearby Silver Creek Preserve. With only a handful of staff at that time, the Conservancy used the house as its first state office in Idaho. After several years, the Conservancy outgrew the house and since then, it has used the house minimally. For months at a time, the house has been vacant. Today it remains in much the same condition as when Ernest and Mary lived there between 1959 and 1961.

“We remain honored by the Hemingway family’s trust in us to care for the home and surrounding area for the past 30 years,” said Toni Hardesty, the Conservancy’s state director. “We share the library’s vision for the home as part of a larger initiative, and we are pleased that it highlights Idaho’s natural environment as an inspiration for Hemingway’s life and art.”

Two of Hemingway’s closest Idaho friends – Clara Spiegel and Anita Gray – were founders of The Community Library in 1955. The Library is unusual among public libraries in that it receives no dedicated tax dollars; it is a privately-funded public library. Many of the Hemingway-related items in the Library’s collection stem from Ms. Spiegel and Ms. Gray, including correspondence from Hemingway to them, books he inscribed to them, and their own remembrances of him as recorded in oral histories. Both women are now deceased.

The Hemingway house sits in a private residential neighborhood on the edge of Ketchum, perched between sagebrush slopes and the Big Wood River, bordered by the towering peaks of the Pioneer and Smoky Mountains. Deer, elk, and an occasional mountain lion traverse the property. Waterfowl and songbirds inhabit the cottonwoods, willows, and brush.

Perhaps even more significant than the house, in terms of its relationship to Hemingway, is the surrounding natural environment. Hemingway had a twenty-plus year love affair with the Idaho landscape – hunting upland birds and, more occasionally, pronghorn antelope, and walking with friends and alone.

“We want to treat the house with reverence, because of its relationship to Hemingway, and because of its special situation in a beautiful natural setting,” said Davidson. “Last year I had the honor of walking through the house with Salman Rushdie, and I distinctly remember him looking at me and saying, “This is an important house in literary history.””

“The house invites us to think about how we remember an incredibly influential writer, how we try to understand his life from the traces that remain, and how we advocate for literature and creative work into the future,” Davidson continued. “Why not grapple with those important questions from here in Idaho, where Hemingway staked his final claim?”