

Papers of a Writer
The Beginning of the Hemingway Society*
July 17-19, 1980
Boston, MA

The tradition of literary conferences has been extremely important for the author societies in American Literature, especially in the case of the organization in honor of Ernest Hemingway. In fact, the association was founded in the middle of such a meeting, one on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor in 1980. This event was especially notable because it was sponsored by the John F. Kennedy Library on the occasion of the opening of the Hemingway Room. Some of the events were in the library, but many took place in an historic building on the island, where we could see the beautiful outline of the library shining in the June sun throughout the discussions. The curator of the collection, Jo August, organized the events, and the proceedings centered on the holdings of the collection, a tour of the library, and a recounting of notable biographical events supported by documents and memorabilia such as the trunk in the manuscript room and the lion rug on the floor beside it. There were some standard scholarly papers, as I remember it, but the emphasis was on the new collection and descriptions of the invaluable manuscripts that were now open to the public.

Several speakers offered reminiscences of their relationship with the author, among them Charles Scribner, Jr., who was representing the firm, and Patrick Hemingway, whose precise observations and incisive intelligence very much impressed the audience. For the opening dinner, Jacqueline Kennedy came on the arm of George Plimpton, and the two of them were clearly the stars of the evening. Mrs. Kennedy was exceedingly generous in personally greeting everyone at the dinner, and she spoke to me about the Finca Vigía, the awkward situation in Cuba, and President Kennedy's admiration of Hemingway's work. She could not have been more gracious.

Perhaps the most important event at the 1980 conference came at a picnic lunch on the lawn when Paul Smith initiated the idea of forming a society devoted to the study of the life and works of Ernest Hemingway. He cited the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society as an example of what we might do, and all eighty of the people in attendance agreed that it would be a great idea. We also applauded the idea that we should attempt to have a conference every two years. Paul Smith was appropriately elected president, and the society was on its way with enormous enthusiasm by the members. There was a great deal of personal cohesiveness among the founding members on that occasion, a sense that here was a group of really good people and scholars, and many life-long friendships were formed on that island.

Mr. Scribner sat next to me at lunch and for much of the conference, and we seemed to get on quite well, so easily, in fact, that I drove him to the airport at the end of the

meetings. He invited me to meet with him at his office whenever I was in New York, which I did several times over the following decade, and on one occasion he gave me a bust of Hemingway done at Princeton, which I donated to the Kennedy Library. Paul Smith came by water from Connecticut to Boston on his personal sailboat, and at the end of the celebration he invited Jo August and my wife and me to join him for an afternoon cruise around the harbor. It was a great finish to a lively few days, and there was much to celebrate.

*Excerpts from "Remembering Madrid: 1984" by James Nagel in *The Hemingway Society Newsletter*, Vol 69, Summer 2017