

## Cuban Embargo Hinders Efforts to Restore Hemingway Estate

By Suzanne Perry

Ernest Hemingway, who lived in Cuba while writing *The Old Man and the Sea*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and other works, left behind a stucco villa outside of Havana filled with furniture, artwork, books, and letters.

The estate, Finca Vigia (Overlook Farm), serves today as a small oasis of Cuban-American cooperation at a time when political tensions have made such collaboration increasingly rare. The mission: to protect and restore Hemingway's house, his documents, and his fishing boat, *Pilar*.

The Hemingway Preservation Foundation, in Winchester, Mass., and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, in Washington, have for almost a year been sending architects and preservationists to Havana to advise a Cuban group that is working to fix the structural problems that afflict the villa.

### Endangered Site

The Cuban government has operated Finca Vigia as a museum since Hemingway died in 1961. But it has been battered by rain, humidity, heat, hurricanes, and termites, prompting the National Trust to include Finca Vigia on its 2005 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, the only location outside the United States.

But like any Americans who try to work in Cuba, the preservationists have bumped up against the longstanding U.S. embargo against Cuba, which restricts travel and trade in an effort to cripple Fidel Castro's government.

The Hemingway Preservation Foundation was created in 2004 by Jenny Phillips, granddaughter of Hemingway's editor, Maxwell Perkins. The first time it applied for a license to work in Cuba, in the spring of 2004, it was turned down by the U.S. Treasury Department, which enforces the embargo, on the grounds that it would promote tourism to Cuba.

One strong opponent was Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Florida Republican whose family left Cuba when she was a child. "I am 100 percent against U.S. funds being used to refurbish properties in a terrorist country such as Cuba," she said in a statement last year.

But the charity regrouped and tried again about a year later. Mary-Jo Adams, the executive director, says it applied for a license jointly with the National Trust, lobbied administration officials, and enlisted support from members of Congress, including Sen. John McCain, Republican of Arizona.

She says the organization emphasized that it was not trying to make any kind of political statement.

"We have Hemingway papers that are deteriorating in tropical climates," she says. "We want to preserve them for scholars for decades for come. I think when you sit down with people and explain it, it's very logical."

In May 2005, the Hemingway group and the National Trust won a six-month license to travel to Cuba to help Cuban architects, engineers, and others evaluate and document the preservation needs. The license was renewed in January until the end of August.

### **Making Assessments**

American preservationists have made three trips to Cuba, including one in late March. On that trip, the travelers included Ms. Adams; William Dupont, chief architect of the National Trust; Wendy Jessup, a museum conservation expert in Arlington, Va.; and Dana Hewson, vice president of watercraft preservation at Mystic Seaport, a maritime museum in Connecticut.

Their goal was to assess the condition of the fishing boat and to bring and install nine "data loggers" to measure temperature, relative humidity, and rain around the estate.

The good news, says Mr. Dupont: Mr. Hewson inspected *Pilar* and discovered that it was in better shape than some people feared. "It's going to be getting an overhaul with a light touch," he says.

Ms. Adams says she was delighted by the progress that had been made by the Cuban preservationists since her visit last November, including installation of a new roof. "It's magnificent to see how quickly and how well the job is being implemented," she says.

The next step, says Mr. Dupont, is to return with an architectural team to further analyze the villa's construction history and document the historically significant parts of the estate, including the villa, a tennis court, a guest house, and pool.

Under their license, the Americans may not contribute any money to the restoration project, only expertise and equipment that has been approved for export by the U.S. Commerce Department. The team could not get approval to bring devices to monitor building cracks, and the data loggers that it installed will have to be removed at the end of August unless the group's license is renewed, says Mr. Dupont.

"It would be better if we could have the full 12 months of data because then you have a full cycle of seasons," he says.

### **Books and Papers**

The embargo has also hampered a related document-preservation project that gets money from the Hemingway organization.

The Cuba working group of the Social Science Research Council and American Council of Learned

Societies, both in New York, has been working with Cuban preservationists since 2002 to restore, convert to microfilm, and place in acid-free containers a treasure trove of Hemingway papers, books, and photos — including 2,000 letters from literary figures and others, draft fragments of novels and stories, and books containing inscriptions and Hemingway marginalia.

But the group cannot send some essential equipment to Cuba for this or other preservation projects, says Stanley N. Katz, a professor of public and international affairs at Princeton University and the group's chairman.

"We can't send them microfilm machines, digital cameras, computers," he adds. Other items, such as hygrometers to measure humidity, must be returned when the licenses expire.

The Hemingway Preservation Foundation, with a budget of \$500,000, has received money from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. But the political climate makes it hard to find donors, says Ms. Adams.

The Cuban government plans to cover an estimated \$648,000 to restore Finca Vigia. But Ms. Adams says her organization needs to raise more money to pay for architects and engineers to draft a preservation plan and to buy supplies and equipment that are allowed under the embargo — including paper and scanning materials for the documents.

But, Ms. Adams adds, "It's difficult for us to fund raise because it is a project in Cuba. Most of the foundations and some individuals have the misperception we are political when indeed we are not."

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