

Cache of Hemingway papers found

Admirers seek to preserve Cuban hoard

by Glen Johnson, Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - A treasure trove of lost Ernest Hemingway manuscripts, personal photographs, and love letters has been seen by outsiders for the first time in decades in the basement of his Cuban villa, and a group with Massachusetts connections is working to preserve the artifacts before they disintegrate in the Caribbean climate.

The collection, which includes what appears to be a rejected epilogue to "For Whom the Bell Tolls," is described by Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer A. Scott Berg as a "mother lode of material." Those involved in the preservation project, including Representative James P. McGovern of Worcester, believe it can serve as a prototype for future academic and cultural collaboration between the United States and Cuba, old Cold War enemies which both venerate Hemingway's work.

Starting with a \$75,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the preservationists have launched a national fund-raising drive to pay for microfilm copies of the collection and to help Cuban officials preserve the basement artifacts. One copy of the material would be stored at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, which already has the country's broadest Hemingway collection.

The group also wants to preserve the author's 9,000-book library in the villa, a sampling of which has uncovered notes and draft letters he wrote in the margins. Hemingway lived in the home, known as *Finca Végia*, or "Lookout Farm," from 1940 until 1960, a year after Fidel Castro led a revolution and seized control of the Cuban government.

"These are materials that form a record of one of the longest and most formative periods of his life, and yet one of the least-known periods of his life," said Sandra Spanier, an English professor at Pennsylvania State University and one of those who has seen the materials firsthand. "If that paper disintegrates, we've lost that part of Hemingway's life, the record of it."

The unpublished draft epilogue, for example, shows Hemingway writing and then bracketing alterations. "It was night [on the road] when Golz rode [back] in a staff car [down the pass] on the road down from the pass to El Escorial," he wrote.

In a June 1, 1953, note to Mary Welsh Hemingway, his fourth and last wife, he asked her to admit she "has been scolding very much lately and very violently." In an accompanying note to himself, he wondered whether "to accept Mary as a scold and give up an illusion or whether I should ride along and learn not to give a damn."

Famed for his macho exploits, Hemingway surrendered to declining health and depression by committing suicide in July 1961 in Ketchum, Idaho, just two weeks shy of his 62d birthday.

In the preceding decades, he cut a wide swath across American arts and letters. His time as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War I became material for "A Farewell to Arms." He moved through Parisian artistic circles between the wars, along with F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and Pablo Picasso - a period he immortalized in "The Sun Also Rises." His experience in the Spanish Civil War became grist for "For Whom the Bell Tolls." But it was to Cuba that he returned amid World War II and where he based his Pulitzer Prize-winning book "The Old Man and the Sea."

Finca Végia (pronounced "fink-ah vee-HEE-ah") was a monument to his lifestyle. High on a hill overlooking Havana in the distance, the villa today is preserved for tourists precisely as it was left. The author who disdained socks had a collection of loafers lined along a wall. Bottles of rum and soda water, testimony to his affection for spirits, stand on the tables. A Victrola still spins out the tunes of Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller on special occasions.

The author used to write in the morning breeze, banging out pages on a Royal typewriter perched on a copy of "Who's Who in America." His prose was marked by short, spare sentences and active verbs, and for the notion that omitting certain material could often strengthen a story. In 1954, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Mary Hemingway deeded the property to the Cuban government in 1961, after she made a harried return trip less than two months after his death to remove his most treasured possessions. They included more than 200 pounds of documents as well as manuscripts stored in his Havana bank vault, all of which was loaded on a shrimp boat that sailed for Florida. Later, the papers were sent to the Kennedy Library following a 1968 exchange of letters between Mrs. Hemingway and Jacqueline Kennedy.

Since then, *Finca Vigía* has been lovingly tended by the Cuban Ministry of Culture. Caretakers have catalogued every item in the house and continued to dust the bookshelves by hand. The home is a tourist attraction, but the caretakers have strung ropes across the thresholds to keep visitors from walking inside. Instead they look through large open windows spaced across the veranda.

The basement visit by outsiders stemmed from a January 2001 cultural trip to Cuba by Jenny Phillips, a Concord psychotherapist who is the granddaughter of Maxwell Perkins, who not only served as editor to Hemingway, but also to Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe. Accompanied by her husband, Frank, the Globe's State House bureau chief, Mrs. Phillips identified herself to the curators and asked to see the villa's interior. The couple returned the following day, when they were given sets of white gloves and allowed free access to the house, its artifacts, and the library.

During the visit, Mrs. Phillips asked the curators if there were any letters from her grandfather. They said there were, but she would have to write to the Ministry of Culture to see them. In the following months, the couple heard from Stephen Plotkin, then the curator of the Hemingway collection at the Kennedy Library, that documents might be hidden in the villa.

The couple sought help in accessing the papers from McGovern, the Democratic congressman who has made more than a dozen visits to Cuba since 1979. McGovern, following the lead of his political mentor, the late Representative J. Joseph Moakley of South Boston, favors a normalization in relations between the US and Cuba, which are currently separated by a trade embargo.

In January, McGovern met in Cuba with Abel Prieto, the minister of culture, and Marta Arjona Perez, president of Cuba's National Council of Cultural Heritage. They agreed to allow a follow-up visit for an assessment of the collection and steps to preserve it.

"In the past, some Americans have gone down and said they wanted to help by taking [all the artifacts and furnishings] back to the United States. Clearly that was a nonstarter," McGovern said in an interview. "The Cubans, with very little resources, had lovingly cared for this house. My pitch to them was this is not about people in the United States trying to take it. Instead, we want to work with you to preserve it for anybody who's interested in it. And it will remain in Cuba."

In March, the Phillipses returned, accompanied by Spanier, the designated editor of Hemingway's letters; Berg, who wrote a biography about Perkins and won a Pulitzer in 1999 for his biography of aviator Charles Lindbergh; and two conservators from the Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover. The group made its way down into the basement, a dank room only 6 feet high. They passed stuffed game heads and rifles wrapped in parcel paper, then stood rapt as one of the conservators opened a file cabinet.

Inside were typed pages of "Death in the Afternoon," Hemingway's 1932 dissertation on Spanish bullfighting, and a 1941 letter from actress Ingrid Bergman. There were scrapbooks of congratulatory telegrams after Hemingway won the Nobel Prize and of news clippings following his two airplane crashes in Africa in 1954. There were 26 letters, written in Italian, from Contessa Adriana Ivancich, a 19-year-old with whom Hemingway had fallen in love. She would later serve as the model for the heroine Renata in "Across the River and Into the Trees."

Another letter, written to his wife Mary, contained instructions for how the cook was to prepare his favorite foods, their correct order of presentation, and an instruction to ensure that the cook did not disturb him while he was writing.

On an inside cover of Hemingway's copy of "Wuthering Heights," he recorded his weight, blood pressure, and pulse on a routine basis.

"It gave you a sense of how the Hemingways lived day to day," Berg said. "That's just gold for a biographer."

At the same time, the visitors were dismayed at the conditions in the basement. Rays of light shone in, indicating openings to the elements and insects. An air conditioner and dehumidifier fought a losing battle with the tropical heat. Few of the documents had been copied because a photocopier at the villa lacked toner.

The preservation project, which could cost \$500,000, includes a three-year plan to copy and collate the papers, digitize the photographs, and make structural improvements as simple as installing window shades and smoke detectors. A US delegation will visit *Finca Vigía* in November to formally announce the preservation project.

While the Bush administration has steadfastly refused to open relations with Cuba until Castro relinquishes power, a growing group in Congress is pushing for an end to the trade embargo and normalized relations between the countries. The Phillipses, Spanier, Berg, and McGovern believe the Hemingway project can only help.

"I think this is going to be a historical coming together of Cubans and Americans around this project," Mrs. Phillips said. "This is not commercial. This is all based on working together to save something precious and very important."