



The desk at which Ernest Hemingway worked.

ERNEST WHO?

HEMINGWAY'S IMPACT ON PIGGOTT
WAS SUBTLE, ITS REMINDERS FEW

BY ERIC FRANCIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL BAXLEY

Atop a low rise in the Clay County town of Piggott stands a fine, two-story Craftsman house that bears a name thick with literary significance: The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum.

Ah, yes — the stuff of legends. World-famous writer marries a girl from small-town Arkansas and sets up shop at her parents' home, where he does some of his most important work.

Well ... yes and no.

For if she was anything, Pauline Pfeiffer was a city girl. Reared in St. Louis, she and her mother and siblings came to Piggott only because her father determined there was good land to be had. Paul Pfeiffer would eventually hold some 63,000 acres farmed by tenants and was, by all accounts, a fair and compassionate landlord. He and wife Mary set up housekeeping in the roomy Craftsman in 1913, bringing along their children — Pauline, Karl, Virginia and Max, who would die in the influenza epidemic a few years on.

But while Pauline may have lived in Piggott, she was cosmopolitan to the core. She went back to St. Louis for college, and then became a fashion writer for *Vogue*, a job that in 1925 took her to Paris. That's when she met a struggling writer named Ernest Hemingway ... and his wife, Hadley Richardson.

By 1926, Pauline and Ernest were an item. The next year, he secured a divorce from Hadley and married Pauline.



One of Hemingway's nonliterary pastimes was playing poker.

She would bear him two sons — Patrick and Gregory — but would be set aside 13 years later to make way for the next Mrs. Hemingway.

However, between the sunrise and sunset of their marriage, she would bring her husband to Piggott. While often it was only a stopping-over point on the way from their Key West home to a hunting trip out west in Wyoming or Idaho, there also were extended stays. And it was during those times that Hemingway would retreat to the study Pauline's sister had created for him, transforming the hayloft of the family barn into as cozy a writer's nest as Piggott had ever seen.

Big windows. White walls. Polished wooden floor. A bathroom. A potbelly stove. Bookcases and chairs, with room to entertain visitors or just stretch out for a good read. A little desk, the perfect place for a typewriter. And vital peace and

quiet. The room radiates privacy, if such a thing is possible.

And within those confines, magic happened. In that study Hemingway wrote the exquisite short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", along with portions of *A Farewell to Arms*, which established him as a novelist and brought fame as well as economic self-sufficiency.

The floodgates were opened. As a writer, Hemingway would own the Thirties.

But Pauline would not own Hemingway's heart much longer. He left in 1937 to cover the Spanish Civil War, and there began an affair with Martha Gellhorn, who would succeed Pauline as his wife after their divorce in 1940.

Outside the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum, though, it's hard to find any obvious evidence Hemingway spent time in Piggott. The city simply doesn't trade on his name — no statue in the town square, no businesses bearing his name or flaunting his likeness.

Neither are there any Hemingway or Pfeiffer descendants around. Ernest and Pauline's sons moved away, while the last remaining member of the Pfeiffer clan — Pauline's sister-in-law Matilda — died in 2002.

In fact, according to Dr. Ruth Hawkins — an Arkansas State University history professor and director of the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum, which the school owns — no one alive in Piggott

today was there when Hemingway was around.

Furthermore, none of his old haunts survive, and they were precious few to start with.

"He would occasionally go to the downtown square. One of his hunting buddies was a guy on the square who made harnesses and leather goods," she says. "He'd go down and drink whiskey up in the attic of the building with him, or play poker. And he'd hang out at the drug store some."

But the harness shop and drug store are long gone, Hawkins says, so "there's not anything that perpetuates his legacy in terms of the downtown area."

Maybe there's a simple explanation for the lack of remembrances: Back then, Hemingway was still a nobody.

"Really, when he first started coming there, he wasn't famous," Hawkins says. "And when he did start becoming



The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum is the only monument marking Hemingway's time in Piggott.

famous, that didn't matter to the people of Piggott. What mattered was he was Paul Pfeiffer's son-in-law."

But that was all right with Hemingway, it would seem, since he wasn't interested in hobnobbing with the local gentry — or pretty much anyone else.

"He did not really ever socialize with the people in Piggott," Hawkins says.

Piggott Mayor Gerald Morris echoed that assessment, and adds that the feeling was largely mutual.

"Among the rank and file people [of Piggott], he was not the best-loved in town," Morris says.

The mayor pins at least part of the reason on the writer's appearance: "He wore short pants and a long beard."

Yet Hemingway did have his small circle of intimates, Hawkins notes.

"The ones he spent the most time with, other than the Pfeiffers, were certainly not part of high society," she says. "They were people he went hunting with or they were people he played poker with."

The poker table in his barn study is the very one he'd sit at with friends for some cards on those evenings he wanted to take a break from writing.

And it was Pauline's brother Karl who introduced Hemingway to a number of avid hunters around the area, Hawkins says.

"He especially enjoyed being there during quail season; there was an abundance of quail there [during] that time," she says. "He also went duck hunting quite a bit."

But there was another reason for Hemingway to spend time in Piggott, according to museum tour guide Karen Trout. Pauline's wealthy uncle Gus Pfeiffer had recognized Hemingway's potential as a writer.

Realizing what this man could accomplish if he was free of responsibilities and could concentrate on his writing, Gus bankrolled the Hemingways. He bought their first two cars, paid the rent for their Paris apartment, and gave them \$8,000 to buy their Key West home and \$25,000 so they could go on an African safari. He also frequently traveled with Hemingway,



Pauline Pfeiffer's sister turned a barn loft into a writing studio for Hemingway.

to fish off Cuba, say, or to visit Berlin.

"[Gus Pfeiffer] made sure they had plenty of time for going places, seeing things," says Trout.

In other words, Hemingway had found a patron. And in Piggott, he had a quiet place to write.

Among the few Piggott residents who became close to Hemingway, according to Morris, the closest was a fellow named Toby Bruce, whom the mayor describes as "just a guy who lived here." But they clearly hit it off, because Hemingway would sometimes bring Bruce along when he and Pauline would head to their Key West home.

And it's there that Hemingway effected what could be his greatest direct influence on Piggott, through the person of Bruce: The filming in town of part of the 1957 Andy Griffith movie "A Face in the Crowd."

"It so happened that the director Elia Kazan and writer Budd Schulberg were friends and had places in Key West, as well," says Morris. "When Toby Bruce found out they were going to do this movie, he said, 'Why don't you come to Piggott?' They did, and the rest is history."

The main scene that was filmed in Piggott called for a swimming pool, and it just so happened that the house owned by Karl and Matilda Pfeiffer — a large, 1933 Tudor Revival next door to the senior Pfeiffers' residence — had one.

Today that house is the Karl and Matilda Pfeiffer Museum and Study Center, run by a foundation established in Matilda Pfeiffer's will, and staff members Teresa Taylor and Ellajean Mack

are happy to show visitors a video of that part of the movie.

"Kids in and around Piggott were paid \$5 each to swim in the pool," Taylor explains, adding that other locals also filled in as extras and in bit parts.

Last year after the city marked the 50th anniversary of that movie, Morris says, a group from Piggott was invited to go to New York City to take part in the official golden anniversary event. The mayor was given the opportunity to tell the tale of how the film came to Piggott to the crowd there, with the original writer sitting nearby.

"When I told this story in New York, I turned to Schulberg and asked him if that's how it happened, and he said yes it was," Morris recalls.

Even if Piggott today doesn't have many obvious monuments to Hemingway, the town's mayor maintains that Hemingway carried with him the legacy of Piggott as he went on to become one of the most acclaimed American writers in history.

"In my opinion, if it were not for Ernest Hemingway in Piggott, there would not have been an Ernest Hemingway in Key West or an Ernest Hemingway [anywhere else]," he says, because while they were here Gus Pfeiffer furnished them with the money "so he could write and play."

So instead of Piggott having a Hemingway legacy, maybe it was the other way around — Hemingway took Piggott's legacy with him when he moved on.

Sounds like a pretty good legacy for a town to leave. ■

WHEN IN PIGGOTT ...

Those who make the trek to Piggott for a visit to the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum also can take advantage of some other sights in the area, and have their pick of festivals at different times of the year.

The Matilda and Karl Pfeiffer Museum and Study Center is located on a heavily wooded, 11-acre tract next to the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum. Home to Pauline Pfeiffer Hemingway's brother and sister-in-law, the house showcases Matilda Pfeiffer's impressive collection of more than 1,400 minerals, geodes, crystals and rocks that she acquired from across the country. The ground floor of the house also is open for tours, and more than 60 varieties of trees and plants are identified on the grounds. It is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday; admission is free but donations are accepted. More information is available at (870) 598-2338 or www.pfeifferfoundation.com.

Piggott hosts two annual festivals. Each spring, on the weekend after Mother's Day, is the annual Rod Run at Heritage Park. People bring show cars from across the country for a day of cruising, displays and family fun. And next Independence Day will be the 82nd annual Fourth of July Homecoming Picnic and Parade, which honors members of the armed services and brings together past and present residents of Piggott.

Pumpkin Hollow in Piggott describes itself as offering "family friendly farm fun," and its activities include farm animals, hay slides, pony and train rides, cornfield mazes, pig scrambles and more. More information is available at (870) 598-3568 or visit www.pumpkinhollow.com.

In nearby St. Francis is Chalk Bluff Battlefield Park, site of several skirmishes during the Civil War, including Gen. John S. Marmaduke's retreat after a failed raid into Missouri on May 1 and 2, 1863. There are trails with historical markers, and the battlefield is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is located on County Road 368 in St. Francis; more information at (870) 598-2667.

The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum is at 1021 W. Cherry St. in Piggott. Admission is \$5 (\$3 for senior citizens) and tours start on the hour from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday, and from 1-3 p.m. Saturday. More information at (870) 598-3487 or hemingway.astate.edu.

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