

# A HISTORY OF THE MICHIGAN HEMINGWAY SOCIETY

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In 1981, I got the idea to have a national Hemingway conference on the campus of Michigan State University. I presented the idea to the National Board at their annual meeting in December. They agreed that a conference in Michigan was a perfect idea, considering Hemingway's close connection with the State, but they encouraged me to try to arrange holding it up north, in Hemingway country, and to get back to them at their next meeting.

In 1982, I naturally visited Petoskey and found that the city was not prepared to host a major conference. The Perry was under reconstruction, so there was no convenient central location for such a conference, and lodgings would have had to be spread all over town. In addition, there did not seem to be anybody in authority who was interested enough to discuss the proposal with me.

So I turned to Traverse City, at the time a growing community eager to accept and help plan for such a conference. The Convention Bureau assigned Anne Braden to work with me, and she introduced me to the Grand Traverse Chapter of the MSU Alumni Club which promised whatever help I needed, and delivered, and to Ken Marek who was to become the on-site Chair of the Conference. And by December, 1982, I had a proposal to present to the National Board which they eagerly accepted. And, with the urging of Russel Nye, MSU English Department Chair, I presented a proposal to the Michigan Council for the Humanities for a grant to help with the conference, and I got \$8,000.

The terms of the grant stipulated that the conference be focused on the State of Michigan, and that its proceedings be open to the public. John Waldmeir suggested that the conference be called the Up in Michigan meeting of the Midwest Hemingway Society, and we publicized it widely as such.

I talked to some people from the Midwest (including the editor of The Hemingway Review into forming an ad hoc Board whose only duties were to be selecting papers, and we sent out a call for them in the Review.

1983 was a hectic year. The grant enabled me to travel to Traverse City often enough to learn something at first hand about Hemingway country. Anne Braden and I determined that the Best Western, which sits right on the shore of Lake Michigan and which had good conference rooms for papers was the best venue for the conference. Ken Marek twice drove me all around Petoskey, Horton Bay, Walloon Lake and Windemere. He proposed that we should hire a bus to take all the conferees on the tour, and that he would plan and lead it. The grant money also enabled me to get both Jim Harrison and John Voelker to speak on the topic of being a regional, Michigan writer. And the grant enabled me to defray the expenses of all those who gave papers.

I had to spend all of the grant money, and I did. I published the conference papers independently and mailed copies to each attendee. I sold copies to people who had not attended, and I deposited the money for those sales plus money collected from registration fees for those who did not give papers in a bank account for the Midwest Hemingway Society where it sat for the next 11 years, since the Midwest Society, which had been formed primarily to sponsor the Traverse City conference, faded out of existence when that conference was over.

But in 1986, at the Second International Conference in Venice, Italy, I got the idea to hold an International Up in Michigan Conference inviting people from all over the world to Nick Adams country. I floated the idea, and was encouraged to pursue it. I had plenty of time. The next open date for such a major conference was 1991.

I retired from MSU in 1990 and began planning. I hoped that the conference could be held in Petoskey this time, so I drove up to check it out. I got some good news and some bad news. The bad news was that, unlike Traverse City, the Petoskey Convention and Visitors' Bureau was not interested in being involved with the planning. They simply suggested that I work it out with the Perry Hotel, which had been restored, and sent me to see Judy Honor. The good news was that Judy and the Perry were interested and co-operative; the best news was that they assigned Audrey Collins-MacMullen to work with me on arrangements.

With the site established, I again asked Ken Marek to join in planning, and he agreed eagerly, promising once more to guide the bus tour which had been the high point of the 1983 conference. And I asked Fred Svoboda to join me in selecting papers and organizing sessions. He agreed, making the project almost exclusively a Michigan endeavor.

In December, 1990, I got the blessing of the National Board for what was now called the Michigan Hemingway Society to host an International Conference in Petoskey in October, 1991, and we sent out an international call for papers. This much accomplished, I confidently applied for another MCH grant, but failed to get it. The Reagan administration did not approve of wasting Federal money on such cultural nonsense so had cut funding. The conference was going to have to be self-supporting.

Because of Audrey and Ken on site, 1991 was hardly as a hectic year as 1983 had been; I didn't need to travel north nearly as often. But the response to our call for papers was very heavy, so Fred and I enlisted the aid of Bob Martin at MSU to help in selecting those we wanted to use and organizing them into sessions. And we asked Michael Reynolds, the Hemingway biographer, to deliver the keynote address.

To the delight of all of us, we had a wonderful attendance. People from all over the world wanted to come to Nick Adams country; we had conferees from Japan, Israel, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, and all over the United States, and they all left happy that they had come. I heard from many of them. They welcomed our hospitality, especially Ken's tour, and they felt that the conference on the whole was more than worthwhile. Many of them expressed an interest in having the papers published, so Fred and I promised that they would be, and ultimately they were by the MSU Press under the title *Up in Michigan Perspectives* in 1995.

The conference was so successful that in our elation, Audrey, Fred, Ken, and I decided that the Michigan Hemingway Society should continue in existence, headquartered in Petoskey. We formed a Board, which honored me with the first Presidency, and we agreed to meet each October after the color tours had ended. We also agreed on annual dues of \$10 (\$100 for a life membership), and as seed money, I transferred to the MHS what funds I had left from the Midwest Society.

From this point on, the History of the Society is no longer a first person narrative. We, the Board, decided we needed a venue in Petoskey for our meetings, and Audrey arranged for the Perry to be that site; we decided that we needed to find a way to recruit members, and Audrey again came through, publicizing the Society to the many tourists who came to Petoskey each season, especially to those of them who came seeking Hemingway; we decided that Ken Marek's tours would be a major draw, and Ken agreed to continue them as he still does; we decided that some sort of program about Hemingway and his works is essential to each meeting, and Fred and I took care of that during the first few years.

This is the end of my part in this history. Charlotte Ponder, our second President, should be asked to continue it. Under her very successful leadership, we expanded our programs to include national Hemingway experts as speakers, and the Society has grown and flourished until now we are a nationally recognized and respected organization.

September  
2006