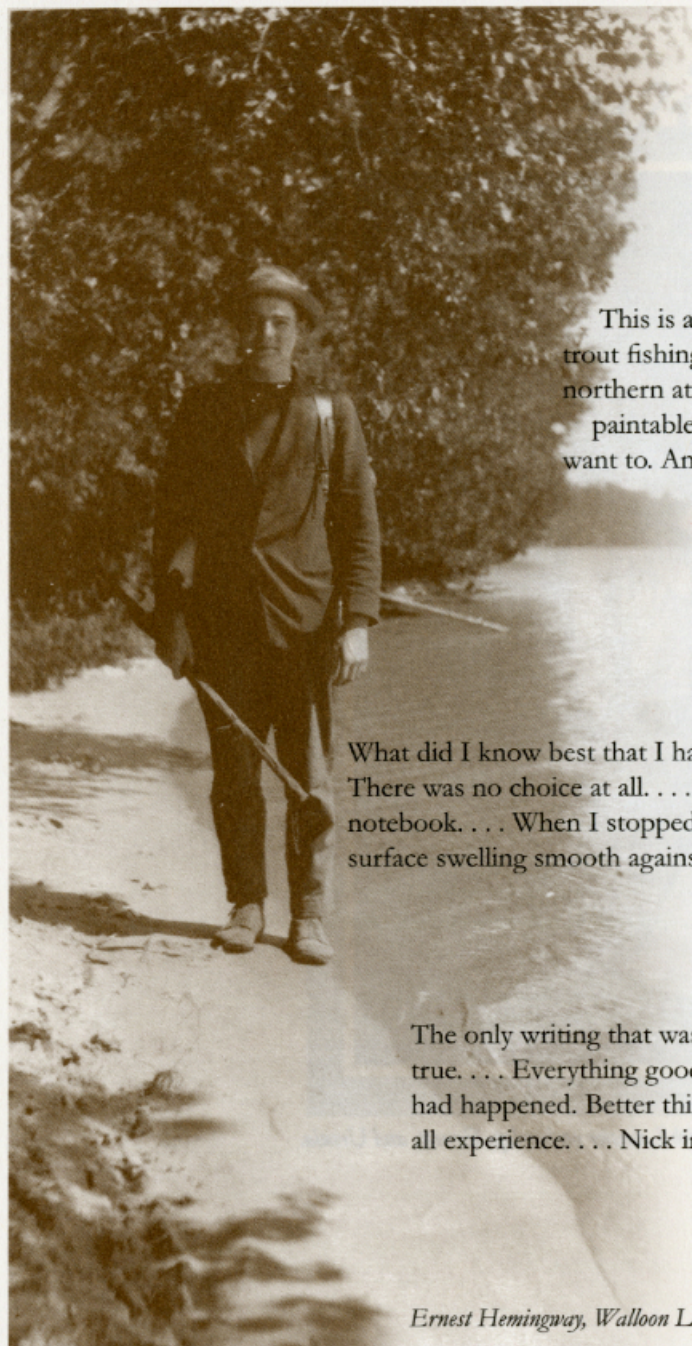


Up North
with the
Hemingways
and
Nick
Adams

By Frederic Svoboda





th the Hemingways

This is a priceless place, Jim. . . . It is great northern air. Absolutely the best trout fishing in the country. No exaggeration. Fine country. Good color, good northern atmosphere, absolute freedom, no summer resort stuff and lots of paintable stuff. . . . It's a great place to laze around and swim and fish when you want to. And the best place in the world to do nothing. It is beautiful country Jim.

Ernest Hemingway describing northern Michigan to
James Gamble, April 27, 1919

What did I know best that I had not written about and lost? What did I know about truly and care for the most? There was no choice at all. . . . I sat in a corner with the afternoon light coming in over my shoulder and wrote in the notebook. . . . When I stopped writing I did not want to leave the river where I could see the trout in the pool, its surface swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge.

Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*

The only writing that was any good was what you made up, what you imagined. That made everything come true. . . . Everything good he had ever written he'd made up. None of it had ever happened. Other things had happened. Better things, maybe. That was what the family couldn't understand. They thought it was all experience. . . . Nick in the stories was never himself. He made him up.

Ernest Hemingway *On Writing*

Ernest Hemingway, *Walloon Lake, 1916.*



The Hemingways: (L-R) Clarence, Carol, Marcelline, Madelaine, Grace with Leicester on her lap, Ernest, and Ursula.

Up North with the Hemingways and Nick Adams

By Frederic Svoboda

Dr. Frederic Svoboda is a professor of English at the University of Michigan-Flint.
He has spent many years studying the writings of Ernest Hemingway
and is a member of the Michigan Hemingway Society.

A companion publication to the exhibit "Up North with the Hemingways"
at the Crooked Tree Art Center, Petoskey
July 27-August 25, 2007,
and the traveling exhibit created for
The Michigan Humanities Council 2007-2008 *The Great Michigan Read* Program

Clarke Historical Library
Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, Michigan
2007

Introduction

The Michigan Humanities Council is pleased to partner with Central Michigan University's Clarke Historical Library and the Michigan Hemingway Society in presenting this catalog that will travel with the "Up North with the Hemingways" exhibit as part of *The Great Michigan Read*, a statewide literature and literacy initiative for young adults to seniors featuring Ernest Hemingway's *The Nick Adams Stories*.

Selecting the right book for *The Great Michigan Read* was essential. The Michigan Humanities Council appointed a distinguished committee to review books for the one-book, one-state initiative. Its main goal was to choose a work of literature with links to Michigan that would have broad appeal. *The Nick Adams Stories* was selected because it met the goal of the program and will engage people in reading literature.

According to a report recently released by the National Endowment for the Arts, literature reading is fading as a meaningful activity, especially among younger people. Less than half of the adult American population now reads literature. From 1982 to 2002, the percentage of American adults reading literature declined from 56.9 percent to 46.7 percent.

It is timely that the Council introduces Michigan citizens to a literary masterpiece that was literally made in Michigan. For the next year, Michigan citizens will experience being Up North, the woods, the water, and the outdoors as they rediscover *The Nick Adams Stories*. As people read the book, participate in programs, and view the exhibit and catalog, they will observe the complex themes in the book, Hemingway in northern Michigan, his connections to the environment, and his love for writing.

The Michigan Humanities Council extends its appreciation and thanks to Central Michigan University's Clarke Historical Library for providing access to the Library's collection of Hemingway letters, artifacts, photos, and more. The Council also wants to extend its thanks to Frank Boles of the Clarke Historical Library and Michael Federspiel of the Michigan Hemingway Society for their leadership, knowledge, talent, and expertise in creating this catalog and other resources to enhance *The Great Michigan Read* programs and activities.

Jan Fedewa
Michigan Humanities Council

Editor's Note

Both this catalog and the exhibit it accompanies explore the Hemingway family and the areas in northern Michigan where they summered. The catalog also examines the fictional character Nick Adams and the northern Michigan, real and reconstructed, that emerged from Ernest Hemingway's pen as he wrote the Nick Adams stories. As the quotation from his letter to James Gamble demonstrates, Hemingway's relationship with the land that he loved in northwestern Michigan, his passionate desire to write about that land, and his need to "make it up," to write fiction more real than reality, make the Nick Adams stories quite complicated. We hope this catalog will help you explore and understand some of the complex themes in these stories. As Dr. Svoboda suggests readers do with Hemingway's Nick Adams stories, we also hope you will open this catalog and enjoy.

The selection by the Michigan Humanities Council of Ernest Hemingway's book *The Nick Adams Stories* for *The Great Michigan Read* program in 2007-2008 confirmed the growing interest in Hemingway and his northern Michigan roots, which had long been promoted by the Michigan Hemingway Society. The society was formally incorporated in 1993 after many years of informal activity. It works to increase the understanding of and an appreciation for Ernest Hemingway in the state that played a vital role in so many of his thoughts and so much of his writing.

To create the Hemingway components of *The Great Michigan Read* program, the Michigan Hemingway Society and the Michigan Humanities Council worked through and with Central Michigan University's Clarke Historical Library. The Clarke holds a significant collection of materials that is connected to Hemingway's years in Michigan, and it has a great interest in promoting a better understanding of the ways in which Hemingway's essays, novels, and short stories relate to Michigan. These three organizations—the Humanities Council, which provided funding; the Hemingway Society, which provided knowledge and talent; and the Clarke Historical Library, which provided technical expertise—worked together to craft a series of Hemingway-related documents, including this catalog.

Frank Boles
Clarke Historical Library
Central Michigan University



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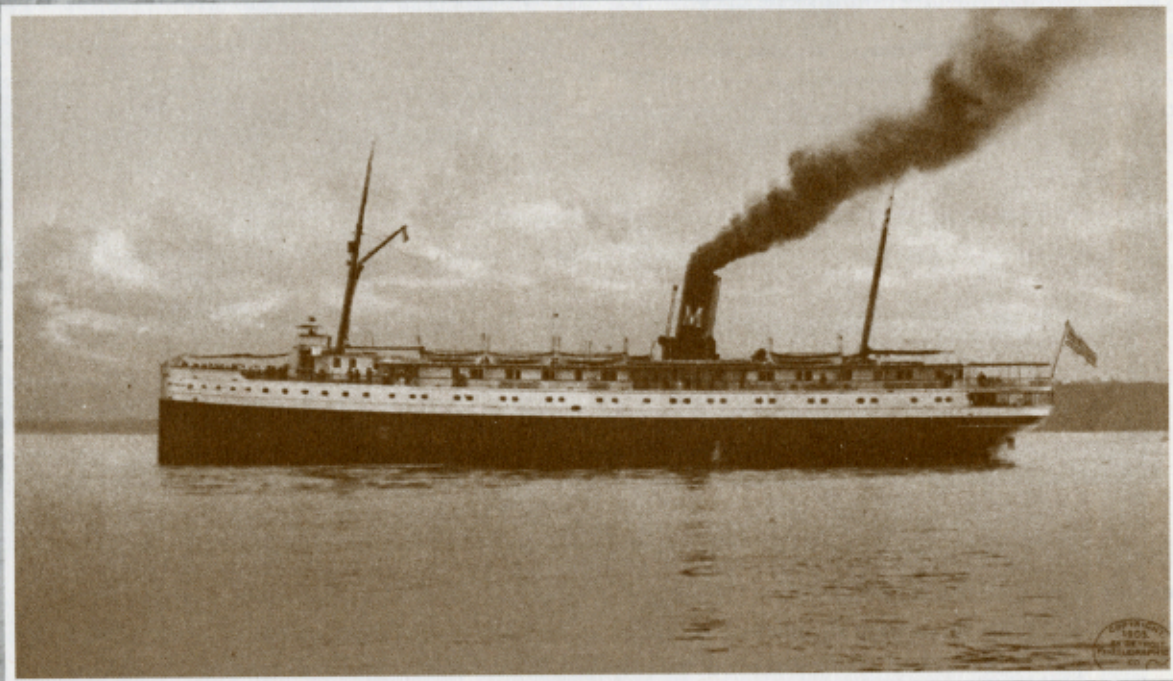


The Hemingways often traveled on the SS Manitou to and from Chicago.

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What was northern Michigan like in the Hemingways' time?

When Clarence and Grace Hall Hemingway first took their infant son Ernest to northern Michigan in 1899, the area was a well-established summer retreat, although its nature was soon to change. In the nineteenth century loggers had exploited much of Michigan, including the northwest corner of the Lower Peninsula. In their wake, beginning at mid-century with Mackinac Island, the tourist industry began to grow. Expanding railroads and steamship lines promoted northern-Michigan vacations as a means of increasing their business, stressing the natural beauty of the land and water as well as the pleasant summer climate. These attributes made northwest Michigan a favorite vacation destination. By the end of the nineteenth century the tourist industry was well established; many visitors stayed for the season, arriving around the fourth of July, while others came for weekend excursions on fast trains from big cities such as Detroit and Chicago.



SS Manitou.



The steamships Tourist and Outing transported people and goods on Walloon Lake.

Bear Lake, renamed Walloon Lake in 1900, had been a summer retreat for at least twenty years before the Hemingways' arrival. The 6.9-mile-long lake boasts more than 27 miles of shoreline and is more than 100 feet deep. The first tourist hotels had opened on the lake in the 1880s, and for twenty years these establishments offered visitors genteel rest and recreation. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, changes were under way. The resort hotels were beginning to be supplemented—and then supplanted—by lakeside cottages. These cottages were seen as sites for family recreation that could provide their occupants with a simpler, more bracing relationship with nature and the north woods.

Those who had the time and the money to spend the entire summer in northern Michigan, rather than just a few days or weeks, began to buy land and build summer cottages. Several of these cottages still stand today, although many have been modified and improved.

During the Hemingways' early years at Walloon Lake, "summer people" from the Chicago area usually arrived first on Little Traverse Bay at Petoskey, which could be easily reached via Great Lakes steamers or two train lines. A spur line from Petoskey was used by light-weight locomotives and coaches called the "Dummy Train." The Dummy carried travelers the few miles from Petoskey to Walloon Village, at the foot

of Walloon Lake. The journey to Walloon Lake's summer cottages was usually completed on small passenger steamers that circled the lake at least twice daily. These would, upon request, stop at a cottage dock. Toward the end of Ernest Hemingway's summers at Walloon Lake automobiles had become more common, and some adventurous travelers made all or part of the trip by car.

Once they had arrived, summer residents spent their time enjoying life in the midst of nature. They swam and fished. Boats, both sail and power, were common, with gasoline gradually replacing steam—making it possible for individuals to own powerboats. Residents tested the comparative virtues of their crafts via the occasional race. Hiking and hunting were enjoyable diversions. Reading was also a popular pastime, particularly on rainy days. Some families gardened, as much for the experience as for the food, as did the Hemingways at Longfield Farm, across the lake from their cottage. For special occasions, several local establishments offered satisfactory meals, which were often built around local specialties such as fresh fish. Or there was the ever-popular chicken dinner.

It was a good life. For Ernest Hemingway it also proved to be an invaluable apprenticeship. It was a time to learn about places and people and the weather—and the transformations brought by changing ideas and technology. (Hemingway was born at the end of the horse-and-buggy era, and he grew up in the time of the automobile.) Years later, when Hemingway sat down to write about his Michigan summers, what emerged was not a snapshot. Neither was it an exact recreation of the Petoskey or Walloon Lake that existed between 1900 and 1920. The northern Michigan Hemingway created was something different: it often evoked feelings similar to those people still express today when they talk about their trip “up north.” At other times Hemingway recreated the older, rougher Michigan of loggers and rail men that he knew partly by experience, partly through the tales of those who had lived the pioneer life. Neither sort of story was precisely journalism, but each one represented the spirit of the place more accurately than could any strictly historical account.



Who were the Hemingways?

From the outside, the Hemingways looked like any other comfortable, middle-class family from Oak Park, Illinois: a father, a mother, and eventually six children, which was not a large number by the standards of the time. Clarence Edmonds Hemingway was a respected physician, and during his lifetime he delivered thousands of babies. Grace Hall Hemingway taught singing, and she also was well-respected in town. According to family lore she might have become an opera star, but the bright lights of Carnegie Hall hurt her eyes, and instead she returned to Oak Park, where young Dr. Hemingway lived across the street from her parents' home. The couple had met in high school, and the marriage between the two tall, robust, attractive young people probably was no surprise to anyone. In their early years together they lived with Grace's widowed father, and Grace's teaching reportedly brought in more than her husband's medical practice, a testament to her skill and hard work. Their older children, Marcelline and Ernest (b. 1899), were very close and were raised almost as twins, although they were born about a year and a half apart. The younger children were Ursula, Madelaine ("Sunny"), Carol, and little Leicester, who was fifteen years younger than his brother Ernest and born when Mrs. Hemingway was in her forties.

From the inside, the Hemingways were perhaps not so typical of early-twentieth-century families. Grace Hall Hemingway, for example, was a woman who was not content to be just a wife and mother. After her father's death in 1905 she designed a new house that mimicked the "Prairie" style of famous Oak Park architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The house was a modern, sensible space for living and working, far different from the ornate Victorian dwelling belonging to her father that the newlywed Hemingways had occupied for the first nine years of their marriage. (Both homes still exist.) Just inside the new house's front door and off a wide porch, there was a waiting room for patients and offices for the doctor. Alongside the house and joined to it was another symbol of Grace's professional life, a large recital room with space for



Dr. Clarence and Grace Hall Hemingway, Petoskey, 1908.

teaching—which included a balcony that could be reached from the main house's staircase. There was a welcoming living room with a broad fireplace, a modern kitchen, and plenty of bedrooms for the children. (Ernest usually could be found in a dormered room tucked under the eaves on the third floor.)

Add patients and music students and the inevitable (and sometimes unsatisfactory) servants, and the house was a lively place. The children performed chamber music together, with Ernest playing the cello. Great Uncle Tyley Hancock sometimes lived with the family, and so at times did young Ruth Arnold, who served as the children's nanny. Ruth was Mrs. Hemingway's confidante as well—a relationship that would have been more familiar to the Victorians than to people of the new century. Some people started rumors about the nature of Ruth and Grace's relationship, which distressed both Grace and her husband.

Dr. Hemingway had an unexpected domestic side and sometimes would call home while making house calls to remind someone to take one of his pies out of the oven. He also had an outdoorsy side and led the local Agassiz Club, named after the famous natural scientist of the mid-nineteenth century. The doctor was an amateur taxidermist and filled



The Oak Park home built by the Hemingways in 1906.

the shelves of his office with his own work. At that time, taxidermy was regarded more as a scientific than a decorative pursuit. He took the boys of the Agassiz Club walking in the local forest preserves, and he took Ernest hunting and fishing in northern Michigan.

Life up north promised the young Hemingways a joyful break from the serious study required of them during the Oak Park school year—and it mostly delivered on that pledge. The family cottage “Windemere” on Walloon Lake was named for England’s largest lake, Windermere, which was well-known as a vacation center and emphasized the family’s pride in its English heritage as well. Cottaging was a new and modern idea at the beginning of the twentieth century, replacing an older style of vacation that centered on resort hotels where all needs were provided for by a professional staff. Cottagers expected to be more involved with the requirements of everyday life, including cooking and cleaning; more directly engaged with the natural world; and interact more with other family members. (In the earlier style of middle-class vacation, children were often neither heard nor seen for much of the day.)

Ideally considered, cottaging could provide a close, warm family experience. In reality, it also meant more work for Mrs. Hemingway than in Oak Park, despite the launches operating out of Walloon Village that could pick up a grocery order in the morning and deliver it to the Windemere dock by that afternoon. In such close quarters family conflicts might arise as well. This happened after World War I, when Ernest returned from overseas and annoyed his parents by lounging around and seeming to have no obvious future path. Later in her life, Mrs. Hemingway built Grace Cottage on the Hemingways’ farmland across Walloon Lake, which provided her with a place where she could retreat from the family vacation. Despite his own requirement for solitude while he was writing, Ernest never quite understood his mother’s need. In his later life, after the day’s work was over, he tended to recreate the family bustle he had experienced at Windemere with whoever was available.

But while the children were younger, the rustic life included lots of leisurely reading, baths in the lake after nightfall, swimming during



Clarence Hemingway cooking over an open fire.

the day, boating in a treasured Old Town canvas canoe and in launches named after the younger girls, rather elaborate birthday parties (Ernest had been born July 21), and guests from near and far. Excursions to visit friends and eat the famous fried-chicken dinners in nearby Horton Bay were also important; Ernest especially appreciated Horton Creek, a rich trout stream that eventually would figure in his famous Nick Adams story "The End of Something."

Fishing was an important activity for both recreational and culinary purposes, as was hunting, especially shooting birds on the wing. The



The Hemingway children roasting marshmallows.



Windemere under construction.

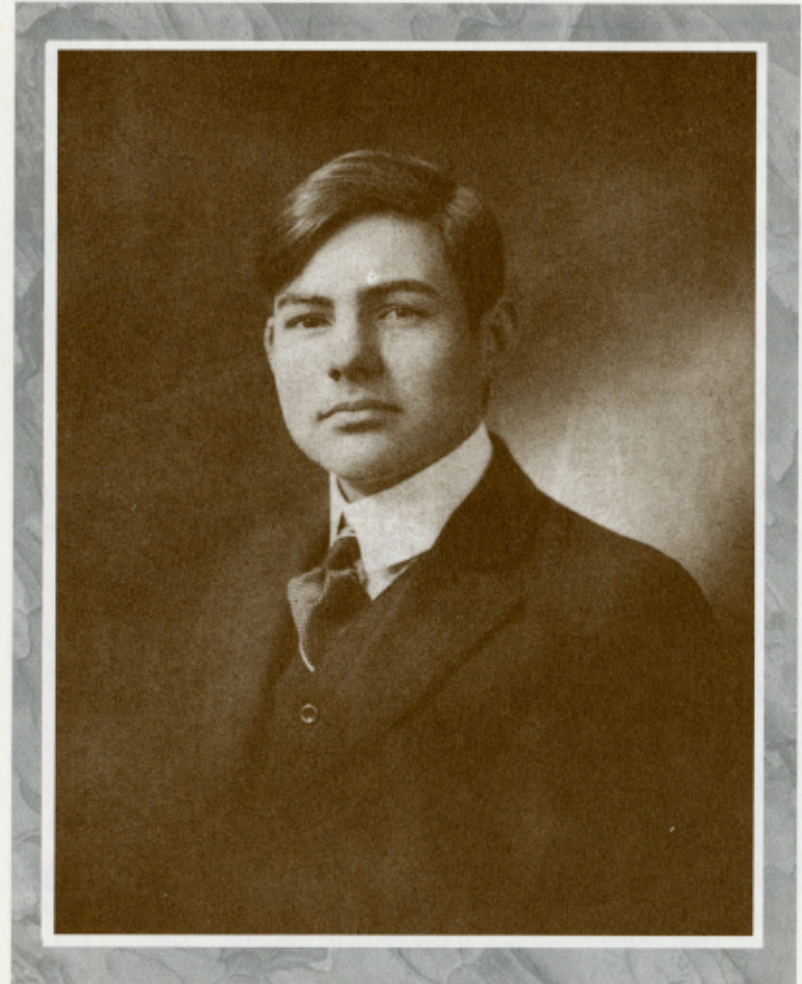
doctor was a crack shot; Ernest spent his life trying to shoot as well, but never quite succeeded. Mastery of the out-of-doors was engaging in and of itself both for young Ernest and his father, but it also suggested the recent, more heroic American past, the frontier. In addition, his life in the outdoors reminded Ernest of reading about the exploits of famous explorers in the Arctic and Africa, including Teddy Roosevelt, whose famous African safari—partly undertaken for scientific reasons—Ernest would recreate twice in his later life and in his fiction as well.

Who was Ernest Hemingway?

Ernie was first of all a nice, middle-class boy from the suburbs. He lived a secure family life, attended excellent public schools, and spent his summers "up north" in Michigan. In that respect he was not so different from any number of nice, middle-class boys, both in his time and in our own. This may be one of the reasons why we still read him, although certainly it is not the only one. Still, his early life was not much different from our own lives, even roughly a century later.

Ernie's family, like many Oak Parkers, valued the cleanliness and gentility of life in Oak Park, conveniently near to Chicago's many attractions but separated from its crime and squalor. "The Village" was Oak Park's nickname. This was something of a misnomer for so sophisticated a community, but it expressed the residents' desire for a simple, rural-seeming life without complications. In Hemingway's time the Village was lily-white, with just a few live-in servants excepted, although later in the twentieth century Oak Park would become a model for successful integration. Edgar Rice Burroughs of Tarzan fame was another Oak Park boy. The first book in his most famous series of novels appeared in 1912, after a life that had led from the suburbs to various adventures, including a stint as an enlisted man in the 7th Cavalry. One suspects that Ernie was paying attention.

Trips to Chicago would have given Ernie a sense that there was a bigger world than that of Oak Park, even if his destinations might have been places as respectable as the world class Art Institute or Chicago's other excellent museums on the lakefront. Even today the centerpiece of the Chicago Natural History Museum is Carl Akeley's mounted fighting elephants, which were collected in Kenya and first exhibited in 1908. In his dynamic setting, Akeley had aimed for a more realistic presentation of the elephants than had previously been accomplished. Again, Ernie probably noticed, for he was proving to be a child on whom little was lost.



Ernest Hemingway, 16 years old.

The family's summer trips to Michigan would also have suggested the presence of a more complicated world, whether these journeys were undertaken by lake steamer from Chicago to Harbor Springs, or by railroad from Chicago's Union Station, or in a Model "T" Ford in a multiday driving adventure. While the Hemingways planned their cottage to be an Eden-like retreat, nearby were destitute Indians, once lords of the woods, now living in an abandoned lumber camp. All about Windemere lay the evidence of an orgy of clear-cutting that had raped the Michigan woods and sent its forest products through Chicago to build settlements on the prairies. Ernie may have imagined a pristine north woods, but the evidence around him told a far different story.

Still, not everything was ruined. Walloon Lake was deep and beautiful, and the abandoned lumber camps near Horton Bay on Lake Charlevoix were vanishing as the woods began to reclaim their own. Dr. Hemingway taught Ernie all he knew about the woods and streams. Ernie treated fishing almost like a religion, one that he in turn would teach to his buddies both before and after he went off to the Great War.

Kansas City was a stepping-stone on Ernest's route to war, and an important one. Ernest's uncle, Tyley Hemingway, arranged a job for him as a cub reporter on the *Kansas City Star*, which was then as now an excellent big-city daily. It was a great change from writing for *Tabula*, the Oak Park High School literary magazine, where some of Ernest's first fiction had appeared. The *Star* stylebook stressed vigorous, straightforward language, and his cub-reporter beat sent him to the great Kansas City Union Station and local hospitals, as well as to other, less savory, locations. The suburb of Oak Park had been invented to keep young men like him away from the perils of the big city, but Ernest was in the midst of them now and beginning to get the practical education that would make up for the fact that he never went to college. From this point on he largely educated himself, becoming a notable autodidact and a teacher of practical skills to others.

Presumably the stench of the Kansas City stockyards would have seemed familiar to a boy from the suburbs of Chicago, which Carl



Ernest fishing a northern Michigan stream in 1916.



Ernest in April 1919 after returning home from World War I.

Sandburg called the “Hog Butcher for the World.” Later on Ernest would leverage his relatively brief *Star* experience into other newspaper jobs that would help to hone his style as well as expose him to a wider world.

Soon Ernest was on the move again, caught up in the frenzy to get “over there” that gripped idealistic young American men as they went off to make the world safe for democracy. His eyesight kept him out of the army, and like many other sons of the middle class (and other writers-to-be) he ended up in the ambulance corps, serving on the war’s Italian front. Unlike its position in the Second World War, Italy was one of the western allies in the Great War, fighting against the Austro-Hungarian and German armies along its northeastern border. There, only a few days before his nineteenth birthday, Ernest found himself delivering cigarettes, candy, and encouragement to war-weary Italian troops. In the middle of the night, a huge Austrian trench-mortar shell blew up his dugout shelter, inflicting by his own count more than two hundred superficial and profound wounds, mostly to his legs. The wounds to his psyche, if any, have been debated by biographers ever since, and are difficult to determine, since much of the “evidence” for them comes from Hemingway’s own creative writing. Pictures of him in the hospital mostly show a radiantly handsome, smiling young man, but in some shots he seems to be whistling, which he explained was his way of dealing with the pain.

In the hospital in Milan, Ernest had a romance that would become the basis for his Great War novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and he came home greatly changed. His sister Carol remembered that in his uniform and Italian cape, he looked just like an Italian. Or perhaps he was just trying out a new role rather than that of the nice kid from the suburbs. A memorable party held in his mother’s recital room brought Italian-Americans to Oak Park from Chicago—and also brought the first alcohol that Carol had known to be consumed under the Hemingway roof. Ernest spoke to local groups on his wartime experiences, and sometimes he even got paid to do so.

For the next several years Ernest would make periodic visits to northern Michigan, but the Michigan experience was somehow not the

same and probably could not be after what he had experienced in Europe. He seemed to be marking time. Although he felt that he was an adult, it seemed to him that his parents were still treating him as though he were a child. In the summer of 1920, just after he turned twenty-one, Ernest went on a late-night cookout with some young people, thinking of himself as a chaperone for the teenage girls who had also been invited. He returned to find several local households in an uproar and found that he was seen as having invited the young women to participate in some sort of debauchery. He also had not been helping his mother with the chores, at least not to her satisfaction, and as a result of the two sins she wrote him a stern letter, later ratified by Dr. Hemingway. Grace was outraged, and her spelling probably suffered as a result. She accused Ernest of "lazy loafing and pleasure seeking; borrowing with no thought of returning . . . trading on your handsome [sic] face to fool little gullable [sic] girls, and neglecting your duties to God and your Savior." This seems to be a pretty stern rebuke for attending a midnight picnic and leaving behind some unburied garbage.

A popular song of the previous year had asked about the returning young veterans, "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Patee?" Ernest had seen Paris, if only en route to northern Italy, and he was not interested in working at Longfield Farm. By 1921, after several forays into journalism, he was married to Hadley Richardson (in a ceremony held in Horton Bay) and on his way back to Paris, where the modern world was in the process of being invented by an international cast of writers, artists, and other intellectuals. The well-regarded American novelist Sherwood Anderson had provided him with letters of introduction to some of these people, including Gertrude Stein, who wrote experimental poetry and prose fiction. Ernest would rapidly move beyond a reporting career into writing that was more adventurous and literary.

Ernest would not look back—except in his writing—which would return again and again to Michigan. Now he would explore a wider world and interpret it for his American readers.



Ernest Hemingway.

Who was Nick Adams, and what was his relationship to Ernest Hemingway?

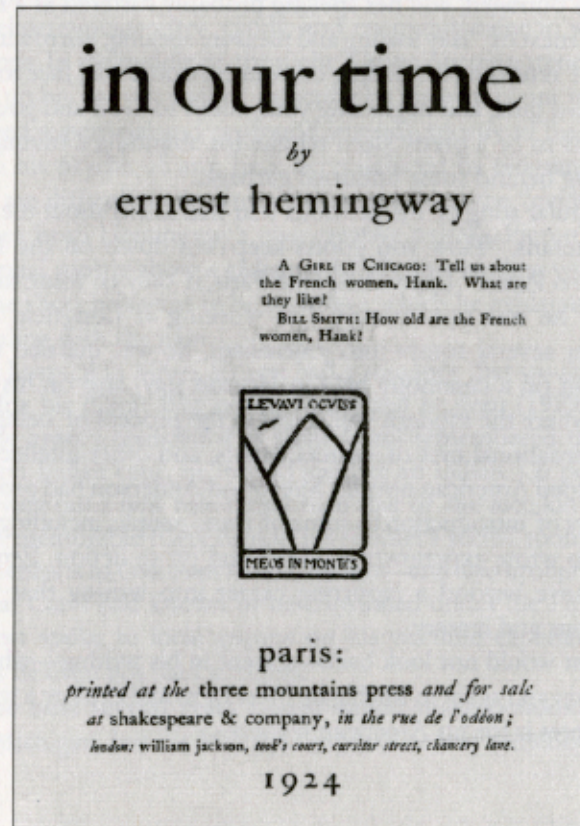
All of Hemingway's fictional heroes have something of Ernest in them, but the closest to Hemingway is Nick Adams. Like Hemingway, Nick experienced summer life in northern Michigan, went off to the Great War—World War I—and was wounded, recuperated physically and mentally, and became a writer.

Nick appears in Hemingway's first major collection of short fiction, *in our time* (1924), where he grows from boyhood to young manhood. Hemingway returned to this character in subsequent stories that appeared in several collections well into the 1930s. A decade after Hemingway's suicide, a posthumous collection, *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972), included both previously published and new stories and fragments. In this collection, Philip Young placed all the works that include Nick Adams in chronological order, but not in the order in which they were written or even the order in which they first appeared. Rather, Young ordered them according to the events that they depicted, from the little boy Nick's first experience with mortality in "Indian Camp" to his mature reflections about his life and his relationship with his father in "Fathers and Sons." In this new arrangement the collection highlighted the many parallels between the real life that Hemingway lived and the invented life of his fictional hero. It also followed the organizational principle seen in that early collection *in our time*, in which Hemingway had placed some of the first Nick Adams stories in chronological order.

So what is the real difference between Ernest Hemingway and his creation, Nick Adams? It is that Ernest lived in the real world, and Nick lives (*still lives*) in a created, fictional world. This may seem like an obvious

statement, but it really is the key to understanding Nick and what Ernest likely intended by inventing him and then writing about him.

A few unsophisticated readers are quite skeptical of all fiction, considering such works as lies. *If it is not "fact" it must be a lie*, seems to be their reasoning, but that is not Hemingway's reasoning nor the reasoning of most sophisticated readers and writers. Rather, high-quality fiction like Ernest's is a sort of "shaped" reality in which the author helps us to see clearly what might be obscured or even hidden in our real-life experiences. In *The Nick Adams Stories* Hemingway gives us the advantage of his reflections on life so that we may understand our own lives more fully.



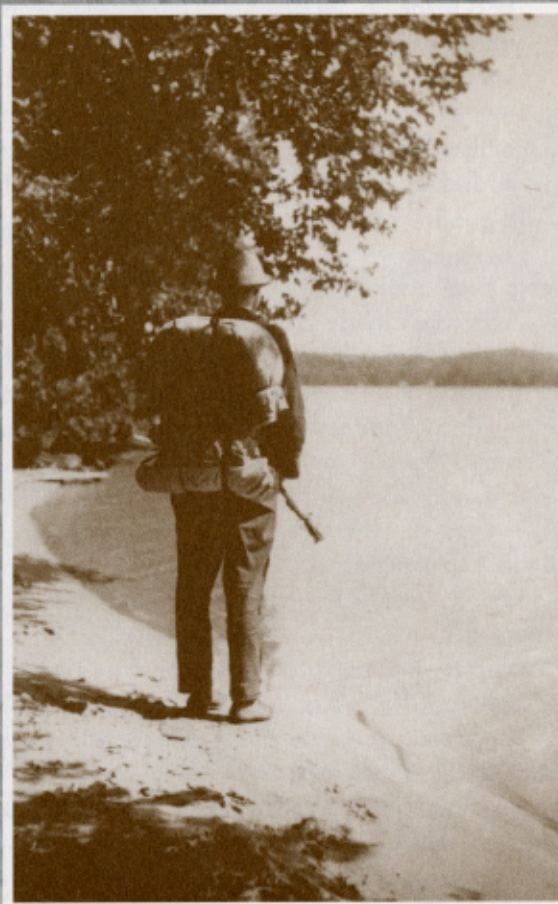
Title page of *in our time*.



*Father and son
(Clarence and
Ernest) shaking
hands the year
Ernest graduated
from high school,
1917.*

It is not difficult to illustrate this effect using our own experiences and our own reflections on them. Almost anyone can look back on past experiences and see them more clearly with the passage of time and with the opportunity to use that time to think about them. A common example is the ancient joke about the child who as a teenager thought that his father did not know much about the world, but who discovers in his twenties “how much the old man had learned.” What really happened is that the child gained in experience and perspective, and as an adult finally understands the lessons that the parent was trying to teach. In

The Nick Adams Stories Hemingway provides a similar sort of experience for the reader—a commentary on the meaning of his own experiences through the medium of a precise, controlled fiction. By shaping what we read, Hemingway helps us to discover not just fact, but meaning. (His last Nick Adams story, “Fathers and Sons,” to which I will return, is actually a son’s reflection on his father’s life.)



Ernest with his camping gear, 1916.

Hemingway sometimes called what he did “inventing from experience.” Here is his explanation from “On Writing” in *The Nick Adams Stories*, which was originally conceived as a draft of the famous short story, “Big Two-Hearted River”:

The only writing that was any good was what you made up, what you imagined. That made everything come true. . . . Everything good he had ever written he'd made up. None of it had ever happened. Other things had happened. Better things, maybe. That was what the family couldn't understand. They thought it was all experience. . . . Nick in the stories was never himself. He made him up. Of course he had never seen an Indian woman having a baby. That was what made it good. Nobody knew that.

Of course, now we all know Hemingway's secret. Ernest built his fiction on his own experiences, but he did not write a journalistic memoir (though as a skilled foreign correspondent he would have been quite capable of doing so). Rather, Ernest looked for the core meanings—and *emotions*—gained from his experiences. Then he wrote stories in which the characters, settings, and occurrences evoked those meanings and emotions in his readers. What he attempted to give his readers was not just an account of an experience, but the *feeling* of experiencing what he himself had experienced. This feeling *with* the characters is probably what makes any extraordinary piece of fiction work, and it is at the center of Hemingway's magic.

Hemingway became a very popular writer via his “big” best-selling novels such as *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. However, he began his creative career as an avant-garde writer in Paris in the early 1920s, and his methods were far more subtle than those usually found in conventional best sellers. Like most modernist writers of that time, Hemingway relied on highly alert, active readers to understand his stories and poems. The Hemingway that we know evolved from being an experimental writer of tiny, poem-like sketches that he sometimes labeled

“Unwritten Stories.” The shortest Nick Adams tales follow that model. All of the stories try to get at some type of essential experience.

As Hemingway described it, “Nick in the stories was never himself. He made him up.” This “making it all up” was not clear to many readers at the time, and it could lead to misunderstandings. For example, take the story “The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife,” which first appeared in the mid-1920s. In this tale, Nick Adams finds himself having to take sides between his father and his mother, and he chooses his father. This echoes events described in Hemingway's biography: his father and mother did have conflicts, and Hemingway came to blame these on his mother, but in the story Hemingway amplifies the real-life conflicts to achieve a memorable effect. The fictional Dr. Adams is a physician like Hemingway's real father. The fictional Mrs. Adams, however, is a Christian Scientist (unlike Mrs. Hemingway, who was a Congregationalist and thought by some to have spiritualist leanings). Whatever conflicts



Clarence and Grace Hemingway, 1895.

might have existed in his parents' real lives were thus made absolute and unyielding in the invented story. One can hardly imagine a worse marital pairing than a doctor and a Christian Scientist. What basis for compromise or mutual understanding could exist between two such characters whose fundamental tools for understanding the world would necessarily be completely different?

If we read the story as a factual statement about Dr. and Mrs. Hemingway's marriage, we miss the point, which relates to marriages in general and the ways in which specific marriages can go wrong because of a lack of empathy or understanding. The story also examines the choices faced by the children of such marriages, and how they may understand what has gone wrong. The events in the story are disastrous for Dr. Adams, in more ways than I can outline here. At the end of the story, little Nick Adams is supposed to go inside to his mother, but instead he chooses to stay with his father and to comfort him:

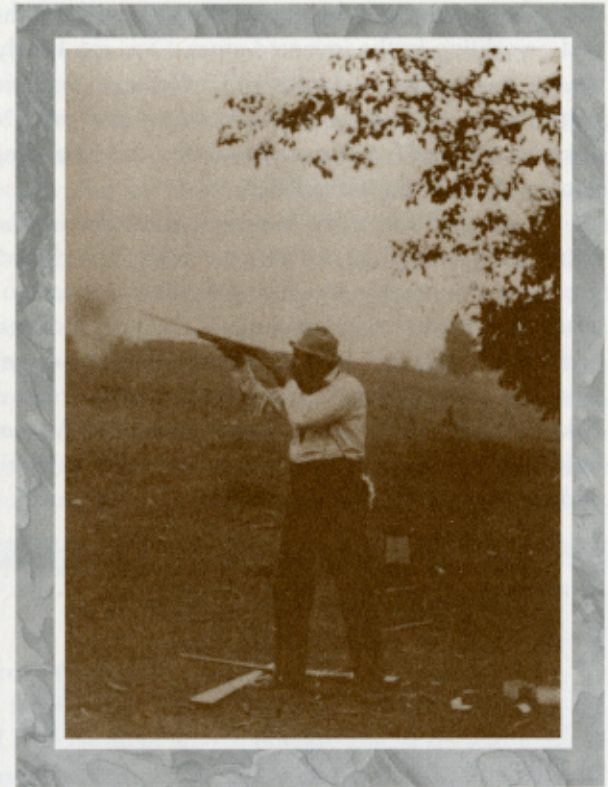
"I know where there's black squirrels, Daddy," Nick said.
"All right," said his father. "Let's go there."

Another interesting fact about the Nick Adams stories is that as Nick grows and matures, he learns more and more about the world. But he never learns everything, which is a subtle insight on Hemingway's part that becomes much clearer when all the stories appear in one volume. This lack of complete resolution is probably one of the factors that led editors to decline to publish Hemingway's stories early in his career, claiming that they were not stories, but sketches—unfinished. In fact, the ending of "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" is perhaps one of the most definite among the stories, yet it is tinged with irony and by the fact that Nick and his father will not be able to spend all their lives in that Eden where black squirrels dwell. They certainly will have to return to the cottage.



Ernest walking rail tracks with his fly rod case, 1919.

The endings of most of the stories follow a similar pattern. Perhaps it is what Hemingway's dear friend and great rival F. Scott Fitzgerald called "the dying fall," a term he used to describe his own best work: not a full resolution, but a falling away from complete and satisfactory closure. For example, in "Indian Camp" little Nick Adams sees a Caesarean delivery and a suicide while in Michigan on a fishing trip with his father and uncle, and at the story's end "felt quite sure that he would never die." Readers, of course, know better. In "The Battler" Nick Adams, who is now a teenager, is by himself on a rail line in the Michigan woods and very lonely. Every time he meets someone he thinks that he is safe, but his yearning for companionship brings only danger: he is thrown



Clarence shooting skeet at Windemere.



Ernest (back, center) on the Horton Bay dock with Bill Smith (back, left), Carl Edgar (back, right), Katy Smith (front, third from left) and sister Marcelline (front, second from left). The Smiths and Edgar would become models for characters in the Nick Adams stories.



(L-R) Carl Edgar, Katy Smith, Marcelline Hemingway, Bill Horne, Ernest Hemingway, and Bill Smith. All (except Marcelline) end up in multiple Nick Adams stories.

off a moving train and faces a beating at the hands of a punch-drunk professional boxer. Every meeting convinces Nick that he has learned something, but whatever he has learned does not quite prepare him for the next encounter. Solitude in the woods may prove safer than being with others, but Nick still feels lonely.

At the conclusion of "The End of Something" Nick, now a young adult, has broken up with a wonderfully self-reliant young woman and done it badly. And he ends up emotionally alone, in spite of a male friend who cheerfully shows up to share the aftermath. In the great final Nick Adams story, "Fathers and Sons," Nick is a mature adult with a child of his own asleep beside him on the car seat as he drives through a rural landscape. The setting makes Nick recall his own father, and he remembers Dr. Adams in considerable detail and with a poignant regret.

This tale was written after Dr. Hemingway's suicide and draws upon Ernest's own emotional experiences. The story brings the fictional Dr. Adams back to life through Nick's memories, eloquently illustrating his strengths and weaknesses, including his inability to communicate with his son Nick. At the story's end, Nick's own son awakens and asks Nick about his grandfather. We expect Nick to talk about his father, but despite the wonderful memories he has just shown the reader, he cannot say much. Nick finds himself repeating his own father's mistakes. Like Dr. Adams, Nick is not able to communicate with his son. Ironies abound.

These stores are not equally satisfactory since Hemingway did not complete all of them to his own standard for publication. Many do not end well, or end at all. "The Last Good Country" seems to be Hemingway's version of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry*

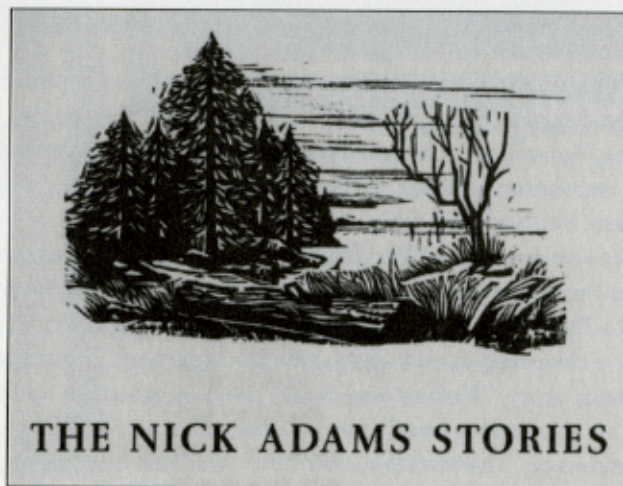
Finn, with Nick and his little sister escaping to the north woods as Huck and Jim escaped to the Mississippi River, but it remains unfinished. So does "Night Before Landing," which was probably intended as the beginning of a novel about the Great War. "Summer People" suggests the joyful experience of a late-night swim at Horton Bay, and some of its characters carry the nicknames of their real-life counterparts including "Wemedge" (Hemingway) and "Odgar" (Carl Edgar). Hemingway did not completely reimagine this story, and it suffers somewhat because of that, but "Summer People" suffers more due to one of the worst editorial errors in American fiction. After making love outdoors in the night, an arguably magical experience, Nick talks to his young partner, who is modeled on Katy Smith, who later married the novelist John Dos Passos. (We do not know if the lovemaking Hemingway describes ever took place, or if he imagined it.) Nick's comic, affectionate nickname for the female character is the same one Hemingway used for Katy in real life, "Butstein," short version "Stut." Critics and biographers of Hemingway are well aware of the shortened version of the nickname, but the collection's editors were not and tried to puzzle it out. They came up with "Slut," which was completely inappropriate to the story. The nickname ruins the tender effect of the lovers' final conversation. Perhaps the editors had heard that Hemingway disliked women, a misconception repeated over the years although clearly refuted by some of the strong female characters in these stories.

In *The Nick Adams Stories*, the effect that Hemingway strove to achieve usually depended on choosing exactly the right word, and the above editorial blunder illustrates how important that word could be. He evokes his time as well as his place in northern Michigan, but he also sees himself as part of the wider world. In this Hemingway was akin to many Americans, who were beginning to find themselves irrevocably linked to this wider world, as we today find ourselves linked in a time of war and uncertainty. Hemingway evokes tenderness, love of all sorts, and loss. He makes clear that the outdoors can be a threatening place but that it can also provide healing and shelter. We can read the Nick Adams stories and feel all of this, and more. It is there for us, just as fresh as the day on which Hemingway sat down in a Paris café and began to write another Nick Adams story, "The Three Day Blow":

It was a pleasant café, warm and clean and friendly, and I hung up my old waterproof on the coat rack to dry and put my worn and weathered felt hat on the rack above the bench and ordered a *café au lait*. The waiter brought it and I took out a notebook from the pocket of the coat and a pencil and started to write. I was writing about up in Michigan and since it was a wild, cold, blowing day it was that sort of day in the story. I had already seen the end of fall come through boyhood, youth and young manhood, and in one place you could write about it better than in another. That was called transplanting yourself, I thought, and it could be as necessary with people as with other sorts of growing things.

A Good Café on the Place St.-Michel

Open *The Nick Adams Stories*, and enjoy!



THE NICK ADAMS STORIES

Illustration from the Nick Adams Stories.



*Ernest Hemingway at Horton Bay
September 1921. This is among
the last photographs taken of
Hemingway in Michigan.*

To learn more about Ernest Hemingway,
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Six Hemingway children in the Ursula of Windemere.

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