



A Farewell to Bachelorhood Ernest Hemingway's Wedding in Northern Michigan

By Dianna Higgs Stampfer



The Hemingway family, along with the bride, on the day of Ernest's wedding. Pictured left to right are Carol, Ursula, Hadley Richardson, Ernest, Grace, Leicester, and Clarence. (Photo courtesy of the Michigan Hemingway Society.)

It should come as no surprise that Ernest Hemingway chose Northern Michigan as the setting for his first wedding. The rural countryside near Walloon Lake was his first real love, so it was fitting that he and Hadley Richardson would begin their marriage alongside the towering trees and flowing rivers that shaped his life.

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, to Dr. Clarence and Grace (Hall)

Hemingway—the second of six children. His first visit to Northern Michigan was in September of that year. He was merely six weeks old when the family completed construction of its simple 800-square-foot cottage there, affectionately called “Windemere.” That visit began a family tradition that would take place every summer of Hemingway’s childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.



The Hemingway family in 1905, with Ernest at the far right. (Photo courtesy of the Ernest Hemingway Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.)

Meeting and Courtship

In the fall of 1920, while recovering from injuries sustained in the Italian Red Cross Ambulance Corps during World War I, the budding writer was living and working in Chicago. Walloon Lake summer friends Kate, Bill, and Yenlaw Kenley “Y.K.” Smith

also resided in the Windy City, and the young adults often gathered to mix and mingle.

One fateful autumn day, Hadley Richardson—Kate’s friend and former Bryn Mawr College classmate—arrived from St. Louis for a three-week visit. Richardson was mourning her mother, who had recently passed, and desperately needed a change of scenery. In her lifetime, Richardson had also lost her father to suicide and a pregnant sister to a house fire. Yet, despite such tragedy, she was eager to love and be loved.

A serendipitous Chicago encounter between her and Hemingway would change both their lives forever. “The moment she entered the room,” Ernest said afterward, “an intense feeling came over me. I knew she was the girl I was going to marry,” wrote Leicester Hemingway in his book *My Brother, Ernest Hemingway*.

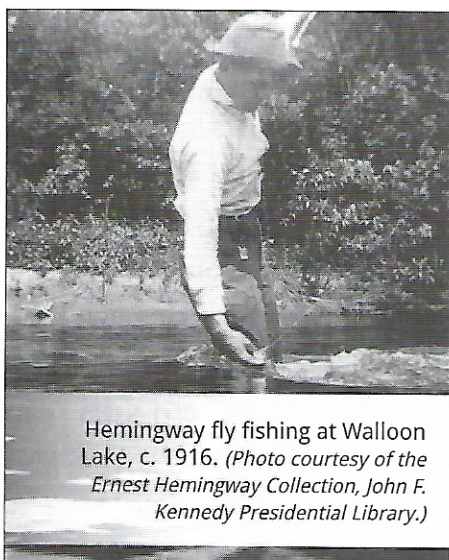
Richardson later recalled that she “noticed Ernest right away,

because he was so attractive.” She felt Hemingway liked her for three simple reasons: her skirt was a good length, she had red hair, and she played the piano well.

Thus began a passionate 11-month courtship, fostered mostly through countless letters between the two lovebirds. Financial constraints for both meant that in-person visits were few and far between, but as pen pals, their relationship blossomed. Many of those letters remain, a permanent record of not only their sappy conversations riddled with slang and nicknames—she was Hash, he was Dearest Nesto and Tati—but also the dreams and struggles of their daily lives.

News of a Wedding

By May, it became known among family and friends that a wedding would occur. “All our family had a fine regard for Hadley from the first, and this grew to be a



Hemingway fly fishing at Walloon Lake, c. 1916. (Photo courtesy of the Ernest Hemingway Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.)



The wedding ceremony was held in the former Horton Bay Methodist Church, which is no longer standing. (Photo courtesy of the Charlevoix County History Preservation Society.)

lasting love,” wrote younger sister Madelaine “Sunny” Hemingway Miller in her 1975 book *Ernie*. Mother Grace Hemingway even sent a letter to Richardson, offering Windemere as a honeymoon location should the couple choose Horton Bay for the service.

“Ernest and Hadley decided to get married that summer,” Leicester wrote about the topic. “And they did not want the fuss and formality that would go with a ceremony back in Hash’s home town. Ernest was strong for Horton’s Bay [sic] and Hadley liked the idea of spending some time in northern Michigan after the wedding.” In her 1961 book, *At the Hemingways: A Family Portrait*, older sister Marcelline also acknowledged the pending marriage. “We liked her so much, we were all tremendously pleased.”

On June 14, Richardson’s sister, Fannie Usher, hosted a tea party with “only intimate friends” present to announce the news. After the gathering—which was held at the St. Louis home of Helen Breaker, Richardson’s dear friend—the social pages published details, although the date had not yet been determined

at that point. It would be another two months before Hemingway and Richardson settled on 4 p.m. on Saturday, September 3, at the Methodist Church in Horton Bay.

Horton Bay was a place Hemingway knew intimately. When he was not at Windemere, he could be found traipsing around the small community with friends, including the Smiths. They would swim, fish, and hang out at Jim and Elizabeth Dilworth’s Pinehurst Cottage—just up the road from the public dock on Lake Charlevoix.

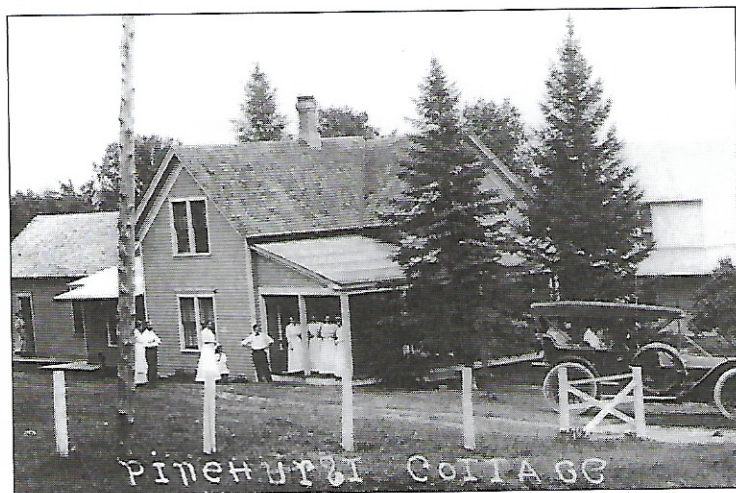
According to Horton Bay-native William H. Ohle in *How It Was in*

Horton Bay, the original Methodist Church stood west of the still-operating Horton Bay General Store. “The church had been built at a very early state in the town’s development. The congregation was never large. The building was a simple structure with perhaps 20 pews and a center and side aisles. Up front there was a small alter [sic] and baptismal font.”

Finalizing Plans

While the date and church had been secured, there were still details to be worked out, such as the preacher and the organist. For that, Hemingway enlisted the help of Grace Quinlan, his friend living in Petoskey. In a letter dated August 19, 1921, he asked, “How about ministers, preachers, priests or relates[?] In your wide and diverse acquaintance can you recommend a capable minister to perform this ceremony? Hash says she doesn’t care particularly what breed of priest it is, but prefers one that doesn’t wear a celluloid collar or chew tobacco.” Quinlan apparently delivered on Hemingway’s request, since the Reverend William J. Datson of Petoskey’s Emmanuel Episcopal Church was enlisted to perform the service.

As the wedding day approached, both Hemingway and Richardson



A 1910 photo of Pinehurst Cottage, where a portion of the wedding-day festivities took place. (Photo courtesy of the Michigan Hemingway Society.)

found time to take individual vacations. After a week-long visit with Hemingway in Chicago, Richardson traveled by train to the Charles A. Brent Camp near State Line, Wisconsin, for an extended vacation with Helen Breaker, her husband, and their infant son.

In late August, Hemingway made his way to Northern Michigan's Sturgeon River for the last few days of trout season with friends Howie Jenkins and Charlie Hopkins. While his pending nuptials would put an end to his carefree days of fishing the rivers and streams of Northern Michigan, bigger adventures were waiting for him around the world.

On September 1, Hemingway stopped at the Charlevoix County building to apply for an "Affidavit for Marriage License," in which he padded his age by a year—hoping to lessen the stigma around the difference in age between him and his bride-to-be, who would turn 30 later that year.

Wedding Day

The day of the wedding was warmer than usual for early September in Northern Michigan, with afternoon temperatures reaching the mid-80s under clear and sunny skies. Matrons-of-honor Fannie Usher and Helen Breaker, along with bridesmaids Ruth Bradford and Katie Smith, spent the morning decorating the small church with swamp lilies and clumps of pollinating goldenrods. To cool off, or perhaps to kill time and ease any nervousness they may have felt, Hemingway and Richardson both found themselves swimming in Lake Charlevoix prior to the service—although at different parts of the lake.

Afterward, the groom-to-be returned to his room at Pinehurst Cottage, where he was joined by Dutch Pailthorpe and Luman



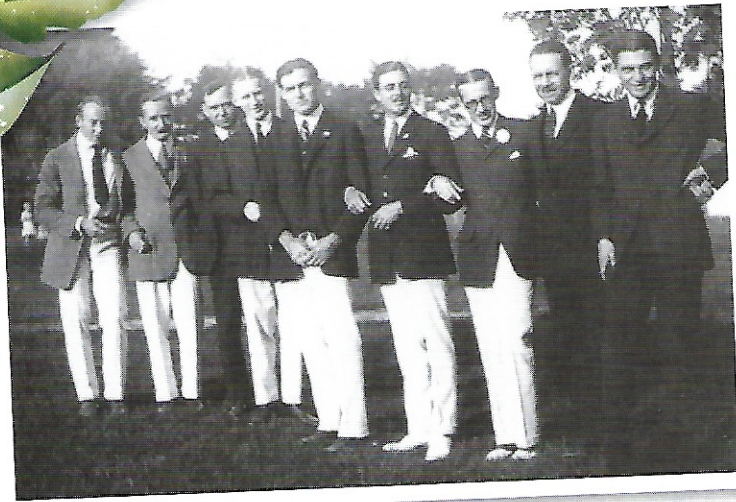
Hadley Richardson in her wedding dress. (Photo courtesy of the Michigan Hemingway Society.)

Ramsdell, friends from Petoskey who were said to calm the groom's nerves with a shot or two of whiskey. That was one of many scenes that made its way into Hemingway's short story "Wedding Day," which appeared in *The Nick Adams Stories*, published posthumously in 1972.

Meanwhile, Richardson had lost all track of time during her swim and returned late to the home where she was staying. She rushed to change

into her lace wedding gown and satin slippers, and her floral-wreath veil headpiece was placed atop her damp auburn hair.

The specific details of the wedding ceremony vary among family members, but together, they paint a picture of the lovely late summer day. Hemingway, his groomsmen, and the ushers dressed in white flannel trousers and navy-blue jackets. His father donned a three-piece gray wool suit with a starched



A wedding photo of the groomsmen, ushers, and groom. (Photo courtesy of the Michigan Hemingway Society.)

wing collar, while his mother wore a long, flowered dress with a tasseled belt. The bride carried a bouquet of baby's breath and was escorted by Helen Breaker's husband, George.

"The family was seated right in front. It was exciting with the sweet smells of flowers and perfumes, as the organist from the Episcopal Church in Petoskey began the Wedding March from *Lohengrin*. Outside there was bright sunlight. The west windows let in golden bars of light among the shadows of the

pews," Leicester Hemingway later wrote. However, given that he was just six years old at the time, it is likely that he drew his account from stories he had heard over the years.

Leicester described the scene further: "Hash looked like an angel, her bridal radiance covered with considerable flowing white veil, as she came up the aisle. Then came Ernest, the debonair war hero, my personal idol—but with legs moving from side to side as well as forward. His heavy white serge trousers

seemed [*sic*] to have a serious case of shivers. It was the first time I had ever seen unconcealed shaking, and it baffled me. Then suddenly the kneeling part was over, the organ's vibrant strains filled the church, and everyone milled around laughing and congratulating everyone else and hurrying out to the lawn for picture-taking. I was relieved to see that Ernest was 'well' again and that the shaking had stopped."

Marcelline published an account of the wedding in her book too, although she was vacationing in New Hampshire and not even in attendance—a fact that disappointed Hemingway greatly. He all but begged his older sister to be there in a letter dated August 11, 1921: "If you wish to see me break down at the altar and perhaps have to be carried to the altar in a chair by the crying ushers, it were well that you made your plans to be on tap for that date," he wrote in desperation. "Seriously you know, come to this wedding. Please,

Clarence's Account

One of the most accurate recaps of the wedding was written by Clarence Hemingway, Ernest's father, in the days following the celebration. His brief account appeared in the Saturday, September 17, 1921, issue of the Oak Park-based publication *Oak Leaves*:

Ernest Miller Hemingway...married at Horton's Bay, Mich., on September 3 Miss Hadley Richardson of St. Louis. The young people preferred a simple country wedding and honeymoon spent at Windermere [*sic*]...to the usual formal church wedding in St. Louis. The little white church at Horton's Bay [*sic*] was decorated with masses of swamp lilies, bitter sweet and boughs of balsam. After the ceremony a dinner was served at Pinehurst Cottage to the bridal party, consisting of Miss Catherine Foster Smith of Chicago, Miss Ruth Bradfield and Mrs. Charles of St. Louis, and Mrs. Roland G. Usher, sister of the bride, and Mrs. George J. Breaker of St. Louis; William B. Smith, George J. Breaker, [J.C.] Edgar of St. Joseph, MO, William D. Horne Jr. of Younkers, [NY], Howell Griffeths Jenkins of Chicago, and Arthur Meyer. The last three named were in the Italian service with the groom, and John Lewis Penticost of Elmhurst, who went [through] school with the groom.

George J. Breaker gave the bride away in the absence of Professor Usher. Other guests at the dinner were Mrs. Ralph Connable and son of Toronto, Edwin Pailthorpe and Luman Ramsdell of Petoskey, Mich.; Dr. and Mrs. Clarence E. Hemingway, Misses Ursula and Carol Hemingway and Master Leicester Hemingway of Oak Park. Many telegrams were received from people of high social and state positions in Italy, where Mr. Hemingway received such signal honors and decorations at the close of the war. The young couple expect to spend the winter in Italy.

Please, Please! You gotta come. I may call it off if you [don't].”

Sister Sunny Hemingway also missed the festivities, since she was wrapping up summer camp in Minnesota. She and Ernest were especially close, and many believe that the characters of Nick Adams and his younger sister, Littlest, mirror the relationship between the two Hemingway siblings. Sunny later expressed her disappointment for missing the wedding in her book, saying that “no amount of pleading changed my parents’ minds.”

After the Event

In his book *100 Years in Horton Bay*, William H. Ohle noted that all the townspeople were invited and most attended. According to some accounts, as many as 450 invitations were sent to friends in Chicago, St. Louis, and Michigan, but given the remote location, significantly fewer people actually attended.



Hadley Richardson (left) and Ernest Hemingway (right) with their only child, Jack “Bumby,” in 1926. (Photo courtesy of the Ernest Hemingway Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.)



The Hemingway family's Windemere Cottage on Walloon Lake, where newlyweds Ernest and Hadley spent their honeymoon. (Photo courtesy of the Ernest Hemingway Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.)

Ohle also referenced a special gift given to the couple by the townspeople. “Mr. Rudolph Dahlgreen, who lived across the road from the church, was a very good amateur artist and had been commissioned by Bay people to do a watercolor of the church as a community gift to the bride and groom. Everyone contributed a share of the picture and framing costs.”

Hadley Richardson shared her recollections of the day decades later in an article by Alfred G. Aronowitz and Pete Hamill that appeared in *The New York Times* in 1964. “I had a beautiful wedding dress made,” she said. “It was a small and very simple wedding. We had wonderful weather, a nice, clear day as I remember. We were married in the little Methodist Church there, and then the whole wedding party and guests went across the road to the Dilworths, where we had a wedding breakfast.”

Following the ceremony and wedding meal, local resident John Kotesky drove the couple three miles from Horton Bay to the end of Sumner Road in his Ford Model T. From there, the newlyweds climbed into the family boat and rowed across Walloon Lake to Windemere to begin their honeymoon.

That first night, the couple placed the twin mattresses from Hemingway's parents' rooms side-by-side next to the hearth, in front of a warming fire. By the next day, they were both sick with food

poisoning or the flu—leading to a less-than-romantic start to their marriage. Yet they passed the time fermenting raisins into wine and boating. Later in the month, they ventured to Petoskey, where an insecure Hemingway felt compelled to introduce his new bride to the “other girls” from his past.

After three weeks, the newlyweds returned to Chicago, where they were formally presented to family and friends at Grace and Clarence's twenty-fifth anniversary party. Neither Hemingway nor Richardson ever returned to Walloon Lake or Horton Bay.

In December, the pair boarded the ship *Leopoldina* for Paris, where they ultimately hobnobbed with writers such as Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others of the “Lost Generation.” By the fall of 1923, Ernest and Hadley were back in North America for the birth of their only child, Jack “Bumby” Hemingway, on October 10. Shortly thereafter, they returned to Paris—where they lived until their divorce in March 1927 after just 5½ years of marriage. 🍷

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