

Florida

Key West inspired many literary giants

Hemingway did some of his best work there

It has been a backdrop to American classics

CECE SCOTT
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

KEY WEST, FLA.— The late U.S. president Harry S. Truman once said: “I’ve a notion to move the capitol to Key West and just stay.”

Funny, a lot of other people have expressed that same sentiment about this treasured part of Florida. You may recognize the names: Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, Richard Wilbur, Elizabeth Bishop. They, and many other writers, stayed here long enough to create some literary masterpieces.

Williams, for instance, wrote such nuggets as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Rose Tattoo* from his home in Key West, where he lived for over 40 years, and where today a theatre at the Florida Keys Community College is named in his honour.

Williams was so enamoured with Key West that he once declared he could have written anywhere but “surely the best (of his works) was in the studio in Key West.”

Hemingway, the undisputed *enfant terrible* of writers, has always been considered the town’s most famous scribe, but this is a place that has inspired many other great poets, novelists and songwriters.

Richard Wilbur, America’s 1993 Poet

of Key West, where he wrote *A Pirate Looks at Fifty*, *Where is Joe Merchant* and *Tales From Margaritaville*.

“Key West was a definite influence on Buffett,” says Thomas Hambricht, the chief historian for Monroe County, where Key West is located. “Buffett observed the type of characters living here and they influenced his songs.”

At a convention of the Parrot Heads (as Buffett’s fans are called) in Key West in 2000, Buffett’s “changes in attitudes” mindset was so popular that devoted fans distributed Jimmy Buffett for President hats.

There’s no doubt his first act as president would have been to move the capitol here.

Visitors are welcome to participate in Key West’s literary heritage by attending one of several writing workshops, seminars or readings.

Heritage House Museum, (www.heritagehousemuseum.org) offers a series of Travel Writing Workshops, taught in the Robert Frost Cottage by Robert Haru Fisher, former editor-in-chief of Fodor Travel Guides.

The Key West Literary Seminar organization, (www.keywestliteraryseminar.org) offers a four-day seminar of panel discussions, readings and a writers’ workshop.

Lorian Hemingway, granddaughter to Ernest and a Pulitzer Prize nominee, (*Walk On Water*), holds a yearly writing competition — The Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition (www.short-storycompetition.com). Winners are announced in Key West during Hemingway Days in late July.



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Richard Wilbur, America's 1993 Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry, spent his winters in Key West as did Elizabeth Bishop, Pulitzer Prize winner for *North and South-A Cold Spring* (1955).

Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, John Dewey, John Hersey and Alison Lurie were also frequent visitors and residents.

Annie Dillard, who won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, and Tom Corcoran (*Mango Opera*, 1998, *Octopus Alibi*, 2003) now call Key West home.

And then there's Jummy Buffett.

The popular songwriter who wrote the hit single *Margaritaville*, also dabbled in fiction writing while a resident

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Cece Scott is a Toronto-based freelance writer.



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