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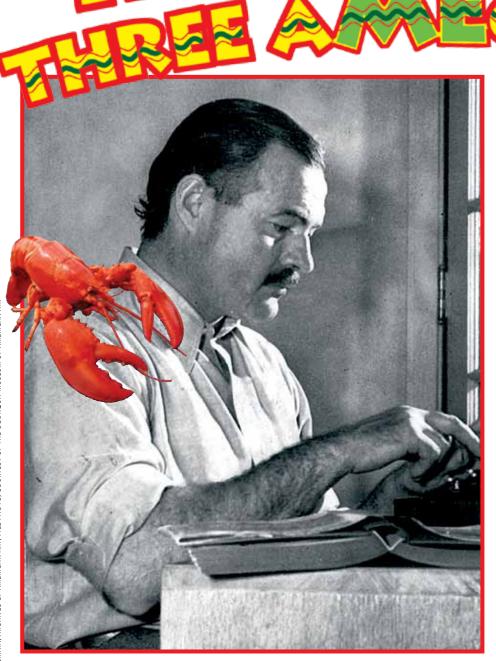
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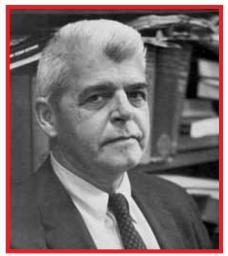
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WALDO PEIRCE



CARLOS BAKER



HENRY STRATER

Three Mainers share an extraordinary connection to famous novelist **Ernest Hemingway**. BY COLIN W. SARGENT

hat's it take to be one of Papa's pals? It doesn't hurt if you're from Maine. Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), **Waldo Peirce** (1884-1970), and **Henry Strater** (1896-1987) knew how to drink and get crazy together. For Pulitzer-prizewinning biographer **Carlos Baker** (1909-1987), craziness was a different country.





Hemingway (left) and buddy Waldo Peirce (right) compare catches off Key West.

WALDO PEIRCE

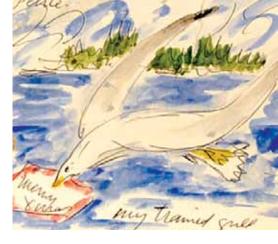
This wealthy free spirit came from a lumbering family in Bangor. After graduating from Harvard, he and fellow Crimson alum John Reed (played by Warren Beatty in *Reds*) hopped a steamer to England, "but Peirce changed his mind...he jumped from the vessel as it was leaving Boston harbor and swam [according to legend, several miles] ashore," writes Dr. William Gallagher, of Bangor, a Hemingway Society member, in *Harvard Magazine*. Stealing aboard another ship, Peirce reached London "just

in time to appear in court and save Reed from being charged with his murder."

After earning his chops in Paris at Académie Julian, Peirce slipped into a 1915 show in "New York City...displaying his work alongside that of George Bellows, John Sloan, and Edward Hopper."

Like Hemingway, Peirce became an ambulance driver during World War I. "He was awarded the *Croix de guerre* for conspicuous bravery at Verdun."

In 1919, when Hemingway saw the run-



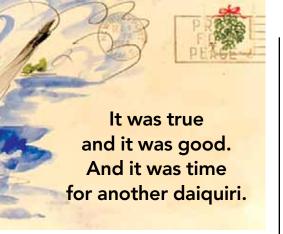
ning of the bulls at Pamplona that would inspire *The Sun Also Rises*, Peirce was there, too, capturing the event with a smashing oil that is now in the collection of Portland Museum of Art. The burly, bearded Peirce and mustached Hemingway appear in the crowd (circled in painting, left)—just a couple of expats during the dawn of the Lost Generation. Laughing and pointing, the friends seem truly happy in the maelstrom.

Hemingway so admired Peirce's work and lust for life he lavishly praised him in extended quotes to *Esquire* contributor Harry Salpeter in a 1936 story, "Rabelais in a Smock."

Peirce seconded that emotion. According to Gallagher, "When Hemingway's face graced the cover of *Time* in 1937–he had just published *To Have and Have Not*—the magazine used a Peirce portrait of his friend holding a fishing pole, eyes focused on the line."

Another adventure Peirce and Hemingway shared was catching a green sea turtle together. Not only do turtles surface in *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway also commemorated the event in "On Being Shot Again: A Gulf Stream Letter" in *Esquire*. "...





it was a pretty day. We had sighted a green turtle scudding under the surface and were rigging a harpoon to strike him..."

The camaraderie between the two amigos spanned decades and continents, from Europe to the Caribbean. Gallagher, who's embarked on a study of Peirce and Hemingway, writes, "Hemingway once asked his young son Jack, 'Who is the greatest man you know?'–expecting to hear 'Papa.' Jack quickly responded, 'It's Waldo.'"

CARLOS BAKER

hat better way to understand the exacting genius of Hemingway's only authorized biographer than to talk to his prize pupil at Princeton, A. Scott Berg? Reached in California, Berg, a National Book Award Winner himself for *Max Perkins* and a Pulitzer winner for *Lindbergh*, has recently released a new biography, *Wilson*. The *New York Times* praises *Wilson* for Berg's "novelist's eye for the striking detail, and the vivid prose style." Following is an interview with Berg on why Carlos Baker is his hero.

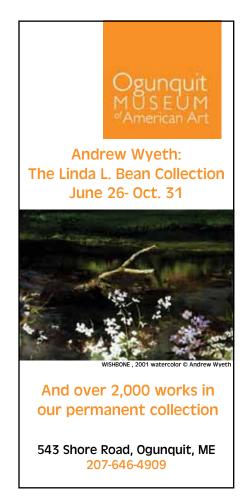
How does your approach to Woodrow Wilson's life differ from the way Carlos Baker approached Hemingway?

My methodology on *Wilson* hardly differed from Baker's. It was one note card at a time and one page at a time. The internet affords the opportunity to make a quick check on some general things; but, like Baker, I relied almost entirely on primary sources. Also like Baker, I work by myself—no research assistants and no secretaries.

Why did Hemingway, with so many scholars to choose from, pick Baker, sight unseen, as his authorized biographer?

I believe that while Hemingway had not seen Carlos Baker, he had seen his work. Mary Hemingway–Papa's fourth wife and







New Brew Pub at Carlos Baker's House in Saco

Even Baker's house is a moveable feast. It was here that the writer grew up and here where he lived when he was an English instructor and track coach at nearby Thornton Academy. When the Wendy's fast-food restaurant was built on Route 1, it displaced the Baker home to its present location at 743 Portland Road in Saco, half a mile north.



"I just bought the house because my lease was up and I wanted to be closer to the beach," says attorney Gary Prolman. "I fell in love with it the first time I saw it. I think the house was built in 1913. After I bought it, locals started contacting me and told me it was Carlos Baker's House. I love Hemingway, so that's just a bonus for me. People have told me Hemingway did come here to visit Baker. One was a bartender when I was over at the [Hannaford] Plaza who has first-hand knowledge of it. A brew pub, Barreled Souls, is opening up on the first floor of my house, and it fits in with the Hemingway connection." Speaking of souls, "For the last year or so, there's just been funny things happening here. When you think of ghosts, you think of scary stuff. But this has been funny. Happenings that are completely unexplained."

Maybe somebody tossing one back with Hemingway's ghost?

"From what Gary's told me, the supernatural occurrences are doors closing, stuff moving around at dinner," says Matt Mills, co-partner in Barreled Souls. Open this summer, "We're focused on making a large variety of beers in the English style using the Burton Union system, which involves oak barrels instead of stainless steel for a deeper flavor. We'll bring people into our tasting room with 50 different flavors. We didn't hear about the Hemingway/ Baker connection until Gary told us you were doing this story. Yes, we're absolutely talking about naming some flavors after Hemingway, possibly in our beers based on cocktails such as the Manhattan. We're also basing beers after wines."

widow-told me that Hemingway, who did not care for literary criticism, thought Baker's was the best that had been written about him. But, indeed, they never met.

Did Baker's native Maine ever come up during your chats with him?

Maine didn't come up often...[but] it did come up. He periodically talked about the beauty of the place, and it was definitely part of his DNA. I once asked him about his first name, if he had some Portuguese or Spanish fishermen or something in his ancestry; and he said no–that it was common practice in New England, where there were so many common surnames, for parents to give their children uncommon first names.

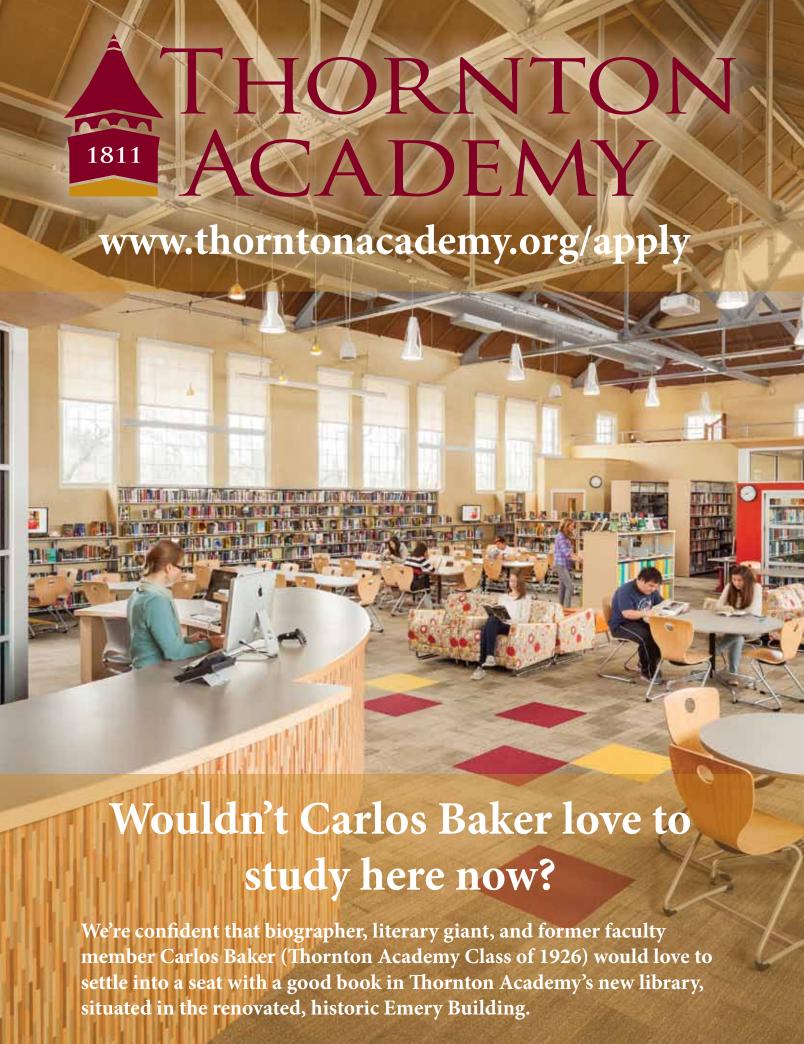
"All good boys love their sisters, But so good have I grown That I love other boys' sisters As well as my own."

-Carlos Baker, Class of 1926, Thornton Academy

What's your favorite story about him?

I never took a class with Carlos Baker. He was my thesis adviser-starting unofficially with me my sophomore year, then supervising my junior papers, and, finally, overseeing my senior thesis on Max Perkins, which became my first book. In that capacity, most of our time was spent "after school"-always one on one-sometime between four in the afternoon and five-thirty or six, at which time he would walk home. We always met in his completely book-lined office, which had the wonderful smell of sweet pipe tobacco. I often went to his office five times a week, especially when he was giving me Hemingway letters to read on the sly, which he did-the Perkins/Hemingway correspondence, which he kept under lock and key in his office.

y favorite anecdote isn't anything humorous, but it was lifechanging. I had spent much of my junior year writing and performing in the Princeton Triangle Club, which produces an original musical comedy every year and tours the country with it. After playing Lincoln Center in New York City, I had several agents come backstage



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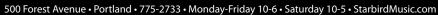
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offering me work. But, they said, I would have to leave school right away. I discussed that with my parents (who were not exactly thrilled to hear all this), and they suggested I discuss my situation with Professor Baker. I did, and he told me he thought it would be a huge mistake for me to leave school, especially when I had such a promising idea for a thesis-and book. "You were the star of the Triangle show this year," he said to me. "Why don't you become the star of the English Department next year?" He urged me to quit the club and devote myself to the thesis/book. Had I not followed his advice, I think I might very well have had an acting career...and this week, I would probably be performing in a dinner theater in Canton, Ohio, playing in Man of La Mancha.

Do you think digital data is changing things for biographers?

I think Baker would welcome information in any form, but I don't think he would trust it. As I don't either. It's one of the reasons we both work without assistants. We both had/ have the need to find and process all the in-



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formation ourselves-and, as a rule, that means primary sources. Very often it's not enough just to glean the words from a document: one must actually feel the paper.

Did you and Baker ever discuss fellow Princetonian Booth Tarkington's influence on Fitzgerald? (Our Maine audience is connected to Tarkington because he spent decades of summers in Kennebunkport.) What do you think Fitzgerald meant, in his notes at the end of The Last Tycoon, when he wrote "Don't wake the Tarkington ghosts"?

I know Tarkington's name came up, but neither of us ever said much about him. He certainly had an influence on Fitzgerald, if only because he was such a passionate Princetonian-the founder, in fact, of the Triangle Club, for which Fitzgerald also wrote and performed. And I have long admired Tarkington. I think Fitzgerald was cautioning himself against getting too sentimental, as Tarkington occasionally did.

Baker doesn't appear to have favored Freudian interpretations of Hemingway's sexuality as expressed in his novels. What do you think Baker would have said



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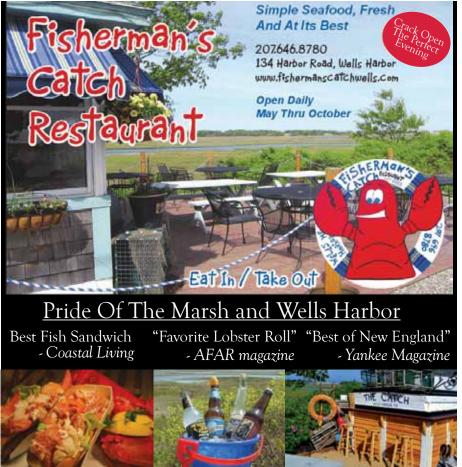
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to Tom Jenks after his edit of The Garden of Eden [an unfinished novel in Hemingway's notes from 1946, published posthumously and controversially in 1986]?

I think he might have said that the book should not be published—which is something Baker had said to me in the early '70s. He said that if Hemingway had wanted to publish it, he would have.

Tell us about Baker's last work, a biography manuscript on Emerson.

Baker's *Emerson Among The Eccentrics* was published, completed by James R. Mellow. The book was pretty far along when Baker died. The beginning appears to be somewhat truncated, suggesting that he might have added more at the front; and, as I recall (I haven't looked at it in a while), it wasn't fully realized in the end. But it's still a wonderful book, giving a rather complete picture of Emersovn and his world.

If you were to write Carlos Baker's biography, how would you open the narrative? And how would you rate his novels and poetry?

I would probably open in a classroom...or in a one-on-one conference with a student in his sweet-smelling office-for teaching was both his passion and his strength. I think literary criticism and biography were his métiers more than fiction or prose, which seemed-to me, anyway-to lack the passion he brought to his other writings.

If you were given the Hemingway assignment today, and his authorized bio had never been published before, what different path would you take?

I would completely immerse myself in Hemingway's writings, study every primary-source document I could get my hands on, and talk to every living person who knew Hemingway that I could. In other words, I'd do exactly what Carlos Baker did.

Being a friend and disciple of Carlos Baker remains one of the great pleasures and honors of my life—which he changed.

Shortly after Carlos retired, I asked if he might send me a picture of himself. He was somewhat reluctant, but his wife, Dorothy, complied–sending a wonderful shot of him at his last graduation, in full academic regalia, acknowledging the crowd. It has hung over my desk–wherever I have lived–for the last thirty-five years.

Baker's *Hemingway: a Life Story* (Scribners 1969) is at the core of any library collection.

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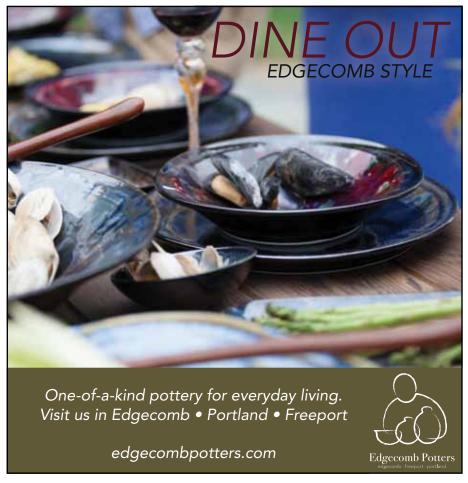
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HENRY STRATER

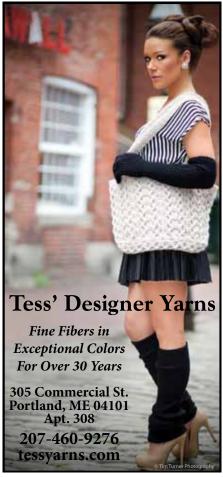
Two surprises about Henry Strater: 1) According to the *Los Angeles Times* obituary, he was the illustrator for Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. 2) Longtime Ogunquit resident Strater was "the inspiration for the character Burne Holiday in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *This Side of Paradise*."

During their days together in Paris, "Mike" Strater and his first wife Maggie were friends with Hemingway and his first wife Hadley when the Hemingways lived near the Luxembourg Gardens on the Left Bank. Hadley Hemingway remained friends with Strater and Maggie even after Strater took sides against Hadley when she lost a suitcase full of Hemingway's short stories at the Gare de Lyon train station.

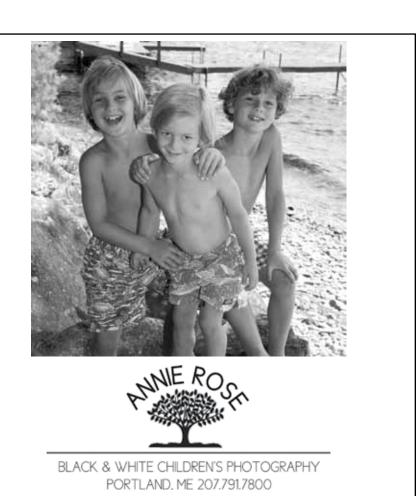
Strater fans will love the show this summer at Ogunquit Museum of American Art: "Henry Strater's Arizona Winters, 1933-1938." Appropriately, it's in the Strater Gallery at the museum he founded among the cliffs of Ogunquit in 1953.

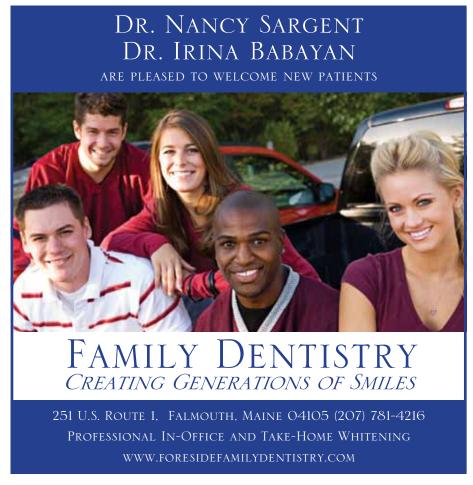












Both Strater and Hemingway loved to cast a line (the *Times* mentions a "record 14-foot four-inch black marlin [Strater] caught during a fishing trip to Bimini in 1935").

"It was my fish," Strater claimed, "but when the photographer came by to take the picture at the dock, Hemingway sidled up close to fish, stuck out his chest and got his picture taken as if he had caught it."

Little wonder these two guys threw some haymakers now and then. "I had boxed in school, and I think I impressed Hemingway with my punch...that was the only way you could impress him."

Fun fact: Strater's grandson, Ogunquit attorney Nicholas S. Strater of Strater and Strater, has told us, "I was introduced to Hemingway here in Maine as a baby during one of his visits just after the war to see my grandfather." Though the Princeton Library can't confirm it, this tale, like the fish of fame itself for Strater, may be the one that got away.





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