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Hemingway's hangout

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



HEMINGWAY'S HANGOUT: 'SLOPPY JOE'S BAR'

By HAMPTON DUNN

KEY WEST --- This was "Papa" Hemingway's town. He had his house here, his women, his "Mob," and his favorite bar or, more accurately, bars.

One of his favorites was Sloppy Joe's Bar, which still advertises itself as "Hemingway's favorite bar." It's at the end of Duval Street, near the Gulf of Mexico, is big like a bar, has lattice-work front doors and has the shabby appearance typical of Key West back in the rum-running days.

And Hemingway's biographer, A. E. Hotchner, author of the book "Papa Hemingway," disclosed that Ernest Hemingway once had a business interest in Sloppy Joe's.

Hotchner quoted Hemingway as saying he was a "silent partner," adding "We had gambling in the back and that's where the real money was. But getting good dice-changers was difficult because if he was so good you couldn't detect yourself, you knew he would steal from you. The only expense in a gambling operation, ours included, is police protection. We paid seventy-five hundred dollars to elect a sheriff who, in his second year in office closed us down, so we closed down the sheriff."

That was many years ago.

A few years after Hemingway's death in 1961 from a self-inflicted gun wound, a cache of his unpublished papers, very valuable, turned up at Sloppy Joe's Bar. There he had stored unpublished material---novels, short stories, poems and important letters.

"Joe" was Joe Russell, original owner of Sloppy Joe's and a friend and confidante of the famed author. He was part of a group of local pals who became known as Hemingway's Key West "Mob."

The bar has new owners but the place still is much like it used to be: Open walls on two sides that allow breezes to cool the customers in this tropical climate. There is a round bar and inside there is a mural that depicts Hemingway at a table pecking away at his typewriter.

