



November 13, 2019, Key West, Florida: Key West Literary Seminar acquires the former home of author Elizabeth Bishop, a national literary landmark.

Key West Literary Seminar, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the understanding of important literary works and their authors, has acquired Elizabeth Bishop's former home, a registered national literary landmark, at 624 White Street in Key West, FL for \$1.2 million. Preservation and restoration work will begin in 2020.

Arlo Haskell, Executive Director of Key West Literary Seminar on the acquisition: **"Elizabeth Bishop's development as a writer was profoundly affected by her experience in Key West.** She completely gave herself over to the place, closely observing and describing an environment she found exotic and striking. In doing so, she transformed her work and developed her mature poetic style—and **she shaped the development of American poetry in her wake."**

The house itself was **built in 1886** in Key West's iconic "eyebrow" style, and when Elizabeth Bishop first saw it, in 1938, she remarked that **"its lines are the most elegant thing in Key West."** Bishop sold it to Lisbeth Weymouth in 1946, and it had remained in the Weymouth family up until the recent sale.

Key West Literary Seminar has a long history of programmatic involvement with Bishop. Thousands of established and emerging authors have attended its annual Seminar since it began in 1983. In 1993, the seminar was devoted entirely to the work of Elizabeth Bishop. This gathering of Bishop's friends, scholars, and admirers (including Octavio Paz, James Merrill, Alice Quinn, Richard Wilbur, and other literary luminaries) helped launch the posthumous renaissance of interest in her work that continues to grow each year.

"Bishop is part of our DNA as an organization," **Haskell** explains. **"It's both an honor and a serious responsibility to become the home's new owners.** The acquisition of this important literary site will exponentially expand the reach and visibility of our organization, while deepening our connection to Key West. As we work to restore and preserve the Elizabeth Bishop House, and make it the public face of our commitment to Key West's literary heritage, we will achieve our mission to a degree that has not previously been possible."

A five-year capital campaign to raise \$2.25 million is now underway. This amount will fully pay off the mortgage for 624 White Street and complete the restoration and preservation projects needed for the home to become Key West Literary Seminar's new headquarters. The organization's **early fundraising efforts received a major boost thanks to a \$300,000 challenge grant and full financing for the \$1.2 million home purchase from the Helmerich Trust.** All contributions up to \$300,000 received by March 31, 2020 will be matched 1:1 by the Helmerich Trust.

Matthew Helmerich a spokesperson for the Trust stated: "The Helmerich Trust has supported Key West Literary Seminar and its programs for nearly a decade. Their purchase of the Bishop House broadens their reach and potential impact, and our contribution reflects that transformative potential.

We wanted to appeal not only to serious scholars, but to anyone who has ever fallen in love with an Elizabeth Bishop poem, or known what it was like to be a young person finding their way in the

world. The letters and poems Bishop wrote in Key West in her 20s and 30s are an essential part of American literary canon, and a part of Key West's identity. We hope our support inspires others to help the Seminar restore and preserve this American treasure.

The Bishop House isn't just an artifact. It's a vital site that shaped the work of one of the 20th century's most esteemed writers. Now it will become the living, functioning home for Key West Literary Seminar. That feels like a perfect fit for us."

Key West Literary Seminar will announce additional updates on restoration and programming plans at the Bishop house over the next year, including the first annual public celebration of Bishop's birthday at the home in February 2020.

To request information, quotes, photos, or other assets related to Key West Literary Seminar's acquisition of the Bishop house please contact, Alyson Sinclair at alyson.sinclair@nectarliterary.com or 612.201.3867. Additional information below.

About Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979)

- United States Poet Laureate, 1949-50
- Winner of the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, 1950
- Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, 1956
- Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, 1966-79
- National Book Award winner, 1970
- National Book Critics Circle Award & Neustadt International Prize, 1976
- Brief biography on [Poetry Foundation](#) and Bishop's [New York Times obituary](#)

About 624 White Street, Key West, FL

- A distinctly Key West "eyebrow" house built in 1886.
- Elizabeth Bishop moved to Key West in the 1930s and lived in the house from 1938-1946.
- Designated a National Literary Landmark in 1993.
- Her time in Key West inspired poems in the collection *North & South*. She wrote numerous letters to her friends and mentors while residing here, including Marianne Moore.
- The home is one of "three loved houses" Bishop mourns in her poem "One Art"
- Tennessee Williams, Wallace Stevens, John Dewey, and Ernest and Pauline Hemmingway also had homes in Key West during this time.

Key West Literary Seminar's initial plans for the Bishop house:

- Restoration and preservation of the house and grounds, to keep it as close as possible to the way it was when Elizabeth Bishop lived there.
- Support the understanding and discussion of Elizabeth Bishop and her work, through public events, scholarship, and publications.
- Promote scholarly engagement, as well as creative writing, and interdisciplinary art-making.
- Host an annual Bishop birthday celebration every February.
- Restore Bishop's garden of fruiting trees and flowering plants

"The house seems perfectly beautiful to me, inside and out. In the yard we have 1 banana tree, 2 avocados, 1 mango, 1 sour-sop, 1 grapevine (1 bunch of acid-looking grapes) and 2 magnificent lime trees, one loaded with large limes." —Elizabeth Bishop in a letter to Marianne Moore on 6/2/1938

- For additional information and updates, visit kwls.org/bishop