

MKRawlings Society
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Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Newsletter

Editor: Phyllis Hansen 13405 SE 171st Lane Hawthorne, FL 32640-7862



Volume xxii Number 4

December 2009

President's Letter

Greetings, fellow Rawlings Society members!

Cold. The weather here in the mountains has decided to conform to the season now upon us. The mountains themselves, just recently recovered with the first white dusting of winter, now stand waiting for the next salvo from the old man from the north. So, I sit in my office, on the last day of fall classes at WCU, amid the myriad weeping and gnashing of teeth of students convinced that an entire semester can be salvaged by one act of contrition, and think of my dear friends in the Rawlings Society, most of whom reside in my beloved, and at these times very much missed, Florida.

I am looking forward to seeing you all at the trustees meeting at Cross Creek, which will occur on 23 January at 12:00 noon. Please be safe in your travels, and I hope to see you as many of you there as possible.

I am even more excited about our next annual meeting, to be held in St. Augustine (16–17 April 2010). I know that Anna and everyone working on the event are coming up with a fantastic program in a stupendous place during a very beautiful month of the year in Florida. Stay tuned for more information on the conference; it will be coming to you soon.

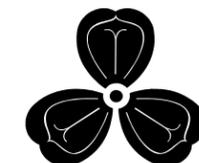
Finally, I hope that you will all have a very wonderful holiday season, full of joy and peace and remembrance. It is a wonderful time of the year, my favorite. And since you will not hear from me until after the last auld lang syne has been sung, I wish you all good things in the upcoming new year, 2010. Oh my, but they do add up.

For now, see you in Cross Creek,

email: bkiser@email.wcu.edu

Reminder: Call for Papers

As mentioned in the September 2009, Issue, paper proposals are invited for the next MKR conference. Topics can include the following: any aspect of Rawling's works; her circle or her connection to other authors; her Cracker characteristics; films of her works; sex, gender, politics or race in her novels; the Cross Creek trial; Rawling's landscapes or her views on nature. Please send 1-page abstracts for 20 minutes presentations to Dr. Anna Lillios, Dept. of English, UCF, P.O. Box 161346, Orlando, FL 32816-1346



Special Dates

January 23, 2010
12:00 noon at the
Yearling Restaurant
Cross Creek, FL

December 14, 1953
Marjorie Rawlings
died in St. Augustine

April 16-17, 2010
XXII Annual MKR
Society Conference,
St. Augustine, FL

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Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings
Society Newsletter

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www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.ucf.edu

A Letter to Janice by Janice Arinson

I recently made the acquaintance of a gentleman who is an opera buff and was a great admirer of Jeannette MacDonald of movie singing fame. He was also a great admirer of MKR, having grown up in the Hawthorne area and, as a grocery boy, carried her groceries to her car. He says she was the only customer who ever tipped him.

As you may know, MKR was not happy that Jeannette MacDonald was cast as the Mother in "The Sun Also Rises" which was Hollywood's version of "A Mother in Manville." He has lent me his copy of that film and it is, indeed very vivid. MKR was not happy with it. This distressed my new friend when he learned of the discord between the two women he most admired.

He wrote a letter to MKR about it. She wrote back to him saying that she was disappointed that they cast "as singer" in the role—not that she had anything against JM. He will send me a copy of that letter.

Renew your membership now! Your expiration date is on your label.
Life, \$1,000., Sustaining \$50., Family \$40., Individual \$30.



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Marjorie's Early Literary Friends

By David Nolan

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is famous for her later literary friends like Ernest Hemingway, Zora Neale Hurston, and Margaret Mitchell, but a 91 year old college yearbook, the Wisconsin Badger, shows that she formed much earlier friendships while working on the Wisconsin Literary Magazine.

The 1918 staff included Ernest L. Meyer as managing editor. He went on to write several books, including the classic work on conscientious objection during World War I, Hey! Yellowbacks! The War Diary of a Conscientious Objector published in 1930.

Meyer was a longtime journalist in Wisconsin's capital city, Madison, and his son Karl Ernest Meyer is still writing books and has served as an editorial writer for The New York Times.

Marjorie Kinnan was one of the associate editors of the "Lit," as was Esther Forbes--who had already won an O. Henry Award for one of her short stories (written despite the disadvantage of dyslexia). Forbes would go on to win a 1943 Pulitzer Prize for her book Paul Revere and the World He Lived in, but will inevitably be best remembered for Johnny Tre-main (winner of the 1944 Newbery Medal) which was made into a movie by Walt Disney.

One of the assistants on the business side of the magazine was Mildred Evans. She wrote half a dozen novels in the 1920s and 1930s under her married name, Mildred Gilman. The first, Fig Leaves (1925), was autobiographical and included as an episode the anti-sorority campaign at the University of Wisconsin that she and Marjorie took part in. She later married Robert Wohlforth, author of the 1934 novel Tin Soldiers and a staff member for Congress' LaFollette Committee that investigated civil liberties abuses during the labor organizing campaigns of the 1930s.

Mildred Evans Gilman Wohlforth later wrote for the New Yorker, and, into her nineties, was still writing for The New York Times. Like many of Marjorie's friends, she lived a long, long life, dying at the age of 97 in 1994.

Thinking back on Marjorie Rawlings more than half a century after their schooldays together, Wohlforth wrote: Even in those days her writing promise showed brilliantly."



Marjorie and Aldo, a discussion of their shared principles, Phyllis Hansen

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings finished writing Cross Creek in 1942. At about the same time, between 1936 and 1947, Aldo Leopold was writing A Sand County Almanac. I'm sure Cross Creek is a favorite of many of you, but possibly you're not familiar with Aldo Leopold and his essays on the conservation ethic. A Sand County Almanac is well known in the environmentalist's library but perhaps its fame has not jumped over into the narrative collections. I write these notes to encourage you to cross with me into the world of Aldo where you will encounter the same passionate love and respect for the environment as Marjorie had. In 1935 Marjorie was discussing with her editor Max Perkins, her two books most environmentally aware, The Yearling and Cross Creek. At the same time Aldo and seven other conservationists were forming The Wilderness Society.

Part I of A Sand County Almanac is divided into monthly chapters much as Marjorie wrote her seasonal chapters in Cross Creek. Aldo devotes March to the return of the geese which although having "been shot at most of the winter, as attested by their battered pinions, know that Spring is now in effect". He continues speaking of their flight and circlings and landings on the sandbars, "gabbling to each sandbar as though to a long-lost friend". April contains a section called Sky Dance telling us about the woodcocks displaying from April through June on a precise ascending time scale. Stokes Field Guide to Birds discusses the same phenomenon, but Aldo's is the one to read. It's utterly elegant and beautiful. When he gets to May, Aldo writes about the Upland Plover, part of the agricultural countryside for generations, now following the cattle which pasture these prairies instead of the buffalo of previous years.

Margie's chapters on the seasons make comparable observations. Shortly into the chapter 'Spring at the Creek', she writes, "We say at the Creek, when the first whippoorwill calls its time for the corn to be put in the ground." And "the robins who bring spring to the north, have for us here no connection with the season. They come to my grove in vast flocks to feed and wait for the mysterious signal that sends them on" and "our bird hunting season ends toward the end of February when mating begins and the quail and the dove have their mysterious calendar marked with the date as plainly as our own." And she writes, "there is no one sign of Spring, but several spontaneous burstings. At the moment of the cypress' needle sprouting and the swamp maple's glory of color, there bloom the yellow Jessamine" and the swamp maple's glory of color, there bloom the yellow "Jessamine" and "Along the fence rows, through the hammocks, slim dry vines are suddenly a mass of golden bloom, so fragrant that the initiate all but swoons."Further on she continues "The first orange blossoms have opened. When the orange blossoms are almost done, the grapefruit blooms and then the tangerines, one knows blindfolded which citrus fruit is flowering and what month it is. For the seasons at the creek are marked not by the calendar, but by the fruits and flowers and birds."

Aldo and Margie had eloquence in their interpretations of their simple surroundings. Margie ends Cross Creek with the conservation's underlying principle, "we are only tenants of this land". Her last paragraph asks, "Who owns Cross Creek?" She continues with images that refute human ownership. She replies to her own question. "The red-birds I think, more than I, for they will have their nests even in the face of delinquent mortgages. And after I am dead, who am childless, the human ownership of grove and field and hammock is hypothetical. But a long line of red-birds and whippoorwills and blue-jays and ground doves will descend from the present owners of nests in the orange trees, and their claim will be less subject to dispute than any of the human heirs."

In A Sand County Almanac Aldo expresses the same premise as he sits on a bench in the early morning. "At 3:35 the nearest field sparrow avows, in a clear tenor chant, that he holds the jackpine copse north to the riverbank, and south to the old wagon track. One by one all the other field sparrows, within earshot recite their respective holdings. Before the field sparrows have quite gone their rounds, the robin in the big elm warbles loudly his claim to the crotch where the ice-storm tore off a limb. The robin's insistent caroling awakens the oriole, who now tells the world of orioles that the pendant branch of the elm belongs to him. My watch says 3:50. The indigo bunting on the hill asserts title to the dead oak limb left by the 1936 drought..."

Both of these authors are philosophers of man's basic requirements, and find their reality in things of the earth. They lived and wrote about the heart and soul of conservation. Aldo fathered it; Marjie lived it, and they both wrote about it. I like to think of Marjorie and Aldo as having met somewhere to chat about the most graceful way to frame their perceptions of the day. Their rich expressions of earthly bonds speak with a power so similar they must have had an alliance greater than coincidence.

