

NEWSLETTER

President's Letter

Dear MKR Society Friends –

Thanks to everyone for the hard work and research that went into this year's 30th annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference in Daytona Beach, Florida. The presentations were superb, as were the winners of our various writing competitions. If you didn't make it this year, we hope to see you next year. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge a special presentation that was made at the start of this year's conference. Ashley Porterfield from Bethune-Cookman University was on hand to accept the first of five annual checks in the amount of \$1000 to fund a student scholarship at Bethune-Cookman.

Announcements

- A Tea with Zora and Marjorie, Friday, July 21 at 7pm, Matheson History Museum, Gainesville. The play will also be performed at the Lincolnville Museum in St. Augustine on July 15th (7:30pm) and 16th (2pm).

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Scholarship in Memory of Idella Parker was approved earlier this year by the Trustees as a fitting tribute to the legacy of Idella Parker. Many of you may know that Rawlings spoke



at a 1945 Florida A&M event honoring Mary McLeod Bethune and felt, following the experience, that she was “more than ever ashamed of the people who try to hold the Negroes back.” What you may not realize is that Idella Parker attended Bethune-Cookman, which was a high school at the time, in 1929 and returned there annually to renew her teacher’s certificate, prior to her work for Rawlings. She began teaching when she was 16. At that time, the black schools were only opened for three months of the year because the children were needed to work in the fields alongside their parents. Parker loved Bethune-Cookman and kept a framed image of the university in her home. It is our hope that this legacy inspires and uplifts the students who receive the scholarship.

Ashley Porterfield, Annual Giving Manager at Bethune-Cookman, and Ashley Lear, MKR Society President

Sincerely,

Zora Neale Hurston War Letter in the News

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Last month, the *Tampa Bay Times* published an article by Gary R. Mormino, scholar in residence at the Florida Humanities Council, on a letter written by Hurston to renowned NAACP leader Walter White. In the letter, Hurston demands that the NAACP respond to what she felt was a dismissal of the federal government to requests that a Signal Corps training school be developed for African-Americans, who had been denied entry to the Signal Corps programs. The response was to set up a program at the Florida Normal and Industrial Institute, what Hurston called “a most insignificant school” under the leadership of William H. Gray, whom Hurston denigrated as “an insignificant squirt.” While her protestations resulted in a review and private reprimand, Mormino points out that President Gray “not only survived the scandal but received a promotion, become president of Florida A&M in Tallahassee in 1944.

The article includes an acknowledgement of the friendship between Hurston and Rawlings, relating the story told to Mormino by our own Flo Turcotte of Hurston visiting Rawlings at Castle Warden Hotel in St. Augustine, which was segregated at the time, by way of the back stairs, as though she were a maid. Hurston influenced Rawlings’s own ever-changing views on race as she grew more vocally supportive of the African American community later in her career.



30th Annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference
Daytona Beach Resort and Conference Center
March 31-April 1, 2017

This year's conference was a resounding success. Jim Stephens opened the presentations with a detailed overview of *Cross Creek* to help promote the 75th Anniversary of the publication of *Cross Creek* and *Cross Creek Cookery*. Ann McCutchan, who is writing a biography of Rawlings, described the career in journalism that Rawlings pursued from 1920-1928, prior to moving to Florida. Lisa Kerr Dunn, a professor of the Medical Humanities at the Medical University at the University of South Carolina gave a fascinating dissection of the communal practices of medicine within *The Yearling* by examining each participant who helps to treat Pa Baxter following his encounter with the rattlesnake. Rodger Tarr and Brent Kinser gave a test that most of us failed on "Cracker Childins" before facilitating a group discussion of the story's literary significance. The conference attendees were given a docent led tour of the Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Art, the largest public collection of Florida art. Our banquet speaker this year was Clay Henderson, former Florida Audubon president and Executive Director of Stetson University's newly formed Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience. Henderson gave a remarkable presentation on the flora and fauna of Florida, the unique environmental qualities of areas in the state, and the extraordinary efforts taken by environmentalists to preserve our ecosystem. We honored several young writing contest winners, along with an undergraduate and graduate writing award and scholarship. Kimberly Voss reviewed *Cross Creek Cookery*. Alexandra Edwards presented, days before her dissertation defense at the University of Georgia, on the World War II fan mail received by Rawlings. Her article is in the current issue of the MKR Journal. Florence Turcotte presented on the effect that MKR's drinking had on her relationship with Baskin. Leslie Poole presented on "The Three Marjories" from her book, *Saving Florida*. Our final keynote speaker was Elizabeth Friedmann, who brought several artifacts with her from the wreck of the Commodore, memorialized in Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat." Friedmann helped discover that wreck and is currently working on a biography of Cora Crane. Thanks to all who joined us!



Ellen Giallonardo with this year's recipient of the school writing contest

*Jim Stephens
presenting on the
75th Anniversary of
Cross Creek*



Cross Creek and Cross Creek Cookery Events

Upcoming events sponsored by The Friends of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc. in celebration of the 75th Anniversary of *Cross Creek* and *Cross Creek Cookery* include a library talk at Alachua Branch, ACLD at 6pm on May 25th, canning with MKR at Cross Creek with cooking from 10-2 and program at 2:30pm on April 22, and Eating Local: Then and Now at Cross Creek with cooking from 10-2 and program at 2:30pm on May 7th.

Call for Papers

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature seeks articles, creative fiction and poetry, book reviews, and notes in the spirit of or regarding the life and work of Rawlings, her circle, and other authors who use the state of Florida as a source of creativity. The *JFL* is a peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the Rawlings Society. Contact Editor Anna Lillios at Anna@ucf.edu.

The Friends of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc. would like to remind everyone to visit their website for a complete list of events related to their celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the publication of *Cross Creek* and *Cross Creek Cookery*. You can learn more at marjoriekinnanrawlings.org.

To learn more about the society, visit our website, <http://rawlingssociety.org>, or check us out on Facebook and Yahoo Groups.

Rawlings Society
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