

The



Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings *Society*

Newsletter

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Winter 2025

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President's Letter

I wish everyone a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2025. We end 2024 and begin 2025 with two very generous donations to the Rawlings Society from trustee emeritus Roy Hunt. Roy has been a longtime supporter of the Society, and we are very grateful to him.

His first donation was to fund a video interview with Buddy Jacobs. Buddy raised the funds and oversaw the work to preserve and refurbish the Rawlings Farmhouse as it had fallen into poor condition after Marjorie's death. Roy's donation paid for a professional filmmaker, our own Donna Green-Townsend, to record the interview. (See interview, page 4.) Roy and Buddy go a long way back at the University of Florida, so Roy was the ideal person to conduct the interview. Their memories will be preserved on our website for all to see. Buddy has graciously agreed to speak at our conference luncheon in April.

Roy's second donation will pay to have a Florida Historical Marker placed at the farm. There is no safe place to pull over on the narrow county road to read the marker, so the state park has agreed to place it on their property. It's a lengthy process. The language on the sign must be approved by Florida Department of Environmental Protection to place it on park property. Then we will submit a detailed application to the Florida Department of State which approves all roadside markers. Once it's approved, Roy's donation will pay to manufacture the marker and install it.

Plans are progressing for the Rawlings Society 2025 conference. I hope you will all be able to attend. You will surely want to sign up for the boat ride. Amelia River Cruises will be taking us from the Victorian era seaport past the modern-day port, past the Spanish colonial fort and original town site to the St. Mary's sound. There you will be able to see the pre-Civil War Fort Clinch before going to Cumberland Island. Approaching Cumberland, you will be able to see the wild horses and the ruins of the Carnegie plantation.

Once on this tour I saw an unforgettable sight. There was a school of thrashing fish jumping out of the water. A group of approximately six dolphins were circling a school of fish and herding them up against a creek bank. Fish started jumping on the bank to escape and several dolphins followed out of the water. One dolphin got stuck briefly and had to wiggle mightily to slide back in the water.

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Near Cumberland Island, you will be able to see King's Bay Submarine Base. Once on the tour we saw a 300 foot nuclear submarine return to base. King's Bay is President Jimmy Carter's gift to Georgia. The historian Douglas Brinkley recently described the late Carter as a voracious reader. He interviewed the former President about reading. Carter said, "anything but politics." He had a preference for Southern writers. Brinkley wrote that he praised Flannery O'Connor's short stories and, you guessed it, *Cross Creek*.

Paul Dunn, President
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society

SPECIAL EVENTS TO ATTEND

"Recipe for Becoming a Floridian"



Marisella Veiga, Rawlings Society member, will discuss *Famous Florida Recipes*, a revised version of Lowis Carlton's cherished (1972) classic with recipes from the Keys to the Panhandle. Veiga is an award-winning journalist and short story writer, a syndicated columnist, and the author of the acclaimed *We Carry Our Homes with Us: A Cuban American Memoir*.

Sponsored by Friends of the Farm at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, Cross Creek, Florida, on Saturday, February 8, 2025. Meet and Greet at 1:30 p.m., Author Talk at 2:00 p.m. Call 352-466-3672 for more information.



Threads of Friendship: Marjorie & Dessie & Zora

Wrap up Women's History Month with a special presentation examining the power of friendship by long-time Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings contributor, Betty Jean Steinshouer.

Rawlings had a lot to learn about Florida when she first moved here from Rochester, New York, in 1928. Her "Cracker" friend, Dessie Smith Prescott taught her survival skills such as planting a garden, fishing, and hunting, as well as how to get through a divorce. Marjorie's friendship with celebrated author, Zora Neale Hurston taught her the reality of the Jim Crow South, and the price a woman pays for freedom. Steinshouer shares stories and photos from the lives of these remarkable women, all three now honored in the Florida Women's Hall of Fame.

Steinshouer first came to Florida with her one-woman show "Willa Cather Speaks" in 1989 and soon added Rawlings to her repertoire, by popular demand from Florida readers. Betty Jean has since toured 43 states presenting Chautauqua-style programs on women authors, homelessness in literature, Ernest Hemingway, America at War, Jim Crow Florida, and marriage equality. She was named a Fellow in Florida Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg in 2004 and her book about Willa Cather, *Long Road from Red Cloud*, was awarded Book Fest's 2020 International Book Award for biography.

Mark Your Calendars for Saturday, March 29, 11 a.m., Headquarters-Ocala Public Library.



Deborah Dickey, Rawlings Society Trustee, Reprises a Gem

A Classic Theatre will present *My Friend Zelma: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings on Trial* by Michael Gannon at The Center for Spiritual Living in St. Augustine. Performances are April 3-5, 2025. Saturday, April 5, at 4 pm, is a Benefit performance for the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society.

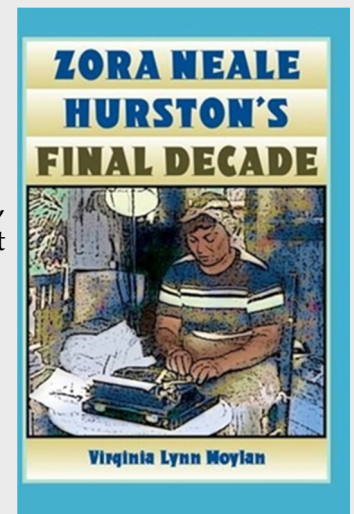
Tickets on sale soon at <https://www.aclassictheatre.org/> Nancy Grote as Marjorie Rawlings.

KUDOS

Lynn Moylan, author of *Zora Neale Hurston's Final Decade* (2011), has been invited to present at the inaugural Zora Neale Hurston Summit, January 31--February 1, 2025, in New York, NY. Sponsored by the Zora Neale Hurston Trust, participants will "celebrate the life, legacy, and work of Zora alongside the Hurston Family themselves."

Lynn's presentation will highlight key aspects of Zora Neale Hurston's writings, letters, friendships, cultural contributions, and pivotal life events during the last decade of her life in Florida. Included will be Hurston's controversial political views and essays, her coverage of the sensational Ruby McCollum murder trial, her contributions to the creation of the first Black baby doll to be manufactured and sold in the U.S., and her final years in Fort Pierce.

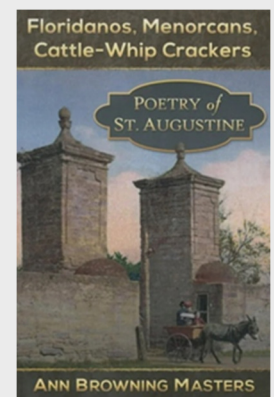
The Summit will be a multidisciplinary event celebrating the arts, humanities, and culture held on the campus of Barnard College, where Zora was the first Black student to graduate in 1928.



Zora Neale Hurston, who died in straitened circumstances in Ft. Pierce, Florida, has had extraordinary posthumous success with all her books coming back into print, and previously unpublished ones meeting with great appreciation. The newest addition to that is the manuscript Hurston was working on in her last years now published as *The Life of Herod the Great*, edited by scholar Deborah G. Plant. Amistad publishers brought it out on January 7, 2025, on what would have been Hurston's 134th birthday.



Ann Browning Masters, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society member, has been selected to serve as the City of St. Augustine's Poet Laureate for the next two years. She will attend official events for the Ancient City and read original poetry. Ann is a 12th-generation Floridian. Her book *Floridanos, Menorcans, and Cattle-Whip Crackers: Poetry of St. Augustine* (2015) was published by the Florida Historical Society, and she has contributed poems to *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* (2014, 2011).





L to R: Buddy Jacobs and Roy Hunt, photo by Donna Green-Townsend (2024)

Meet “Buddy” Jacobs, the Man Behind the Restoration of MKR’s Cross Creek Home

By Donna Green-Townsend (This article first appeared in the MKR Friends of the Farm newsletter and is reprinted with permission from the author.)

Thousands of people have made the literary journey to the historic home of the late Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in Cross Creek, Florida since her death in 1953. The Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Yearling* continues to inspire those who visit her cracker style home. Perhaps no one was inspired more than attorney Arthur “Buddy” Jacobs. After graduating from the University of Florida Law School, Jacobs was appointed to be Dean of University Relations and Development for the University of Florida (UF) by then UF President Stephen C. O’Connell. It was through that position that “Buddy” Jacobs became the key person responsible for spearheading the restoration effort of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’ home. Rawlings had bequeathed her property to UF upon her death. Her desire was for English literature and graduate students to use the location for inspiration, but the home soon fell into disrepair and UF closed the doors, that is until “Buddy” Jacobs took action. It’s a colorful story that he shared with retired Distinguished UF Law Professor Roy Hunt.

When Marjorie Rawlings bought her farm in 1928, the home was already there. Neighbors in Cross Creek remember seeing her typing away for hours on her front porch. By the 1960s, Jacobs says the house needed restoration.

“So, I went down to see it and it was in bad shape. Needed a lot of help. A lot of things needed to be fixed in it.”

Jacobs started making some plans.

“The first thing, the furniture in there was in terrible shape. So, I got the furniture out. A good friend of mine, Dennis Murphy, he was a tackle, he was from Valdosta, Georgia, a tackle for the Gators, varsity. He and I got a rental truck. He and I went out there. And on a Monday we put all the furniture in a great big rental truck and took it to Raiford Prison.”

Jacobs worked out an arrangement with the head of the prison in Raiford to have the woodworking crew in the prison restore the furniture. In addition to bringing the furniture to the prison, Jacobs also shared Marjorie’s books with the inmates.

“They worked on it for about six months. I would go up there periodically to check on what they were doing and I brought *The Yearling*. I brought *Cross Creek* and talked to them about those books and left them a couple of copies and so I kind of lectured about Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings.”



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Meanwhile, Jacobs started working on other aesthetics in the Rawlings house.

"I also went to Sears and Roebuck in Gainesville and said I need some paint 'cuz I want to restore Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' house. They said fine, no problem. So, they gave me all the paint I needed to go down there and paint the inside and part of the outside of the house. And I did that on my own. And then I went to J.C. Penney's. I said, 'I need some curtains.' J.C. Penney's gave me these period curtains of that era. They were very nicely fitting in that house. And so, I got that done, got it all done. Got it painted, brought the furniture back."

Then Jacobs says it was time to celebrate the reopening of the house and property. He bought lemonade and sugar cookies and arranged for some very unique musical entertainment.

"Well, also I got the Raiford String Band to come. And so the Raiford String Band's comin' down, and I wanted those four guys who helped me do all the furniture, I wanted them to come. And I got the prison to agree to let them come."

When the prisoners weren't playing music, they gave house tours.

"They talked about Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' books. They talked about the *Cross Creek* book. They talked about *The Yearling* book. And they did that on the tour. Well, there were a lot of people who showed up. Over 200 people showed up. It was a wonderful afternoon."

Following the successful reception, Jacobs went to work with plans to make sure the Rawlings house would be maintained for the future. He put together a fundraiser and with the cooperation of UF Professor Robert Carson he collected donations for copies of prints of the sketches made by Carson while he and his wife Estelle lived in the Rawlings home on weekends giving tours. The money made from those sold prints went into the Florida Trust for Preservation for the home. Those same prints can be seen in the book, *Frontier Eden*, by Gordon Bigelow.

"Buddy" Jacobs has had a passion for historic preservation for more than 50 years. He's nationally known for his work not only in Nantucket, but also for restoration efforts in the Fernandina Beach area where he has lived for many years. He is particularly proud of his early work on the restoration of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic home.

"It is certainly deserving. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is one of the most extraordinary people, authors in America. I served on the National Council for the Arts under Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton and I've dealt with a lot of authors across the nation over all these years and I've gotta tell ya, she is so extraordinarily outstanding in her thoughts about preserving Florida, her thoughts about trying to not let all the growth destroy Florida were just phenomenal back in that era, back in the 40s and 50s. And her writings were extraordinary."

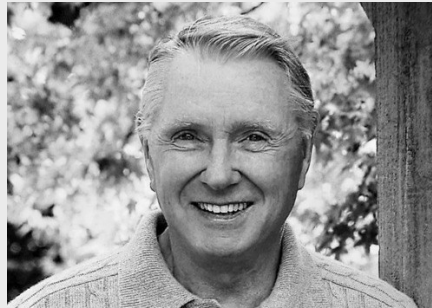
"Buddy" Jacobs will be a featured speaker at the 36th Annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference to be held on Amelia Island, Friday and Saturday, April 11-12, 2025.

Jacobs' remarks come from an interview he did with retired Distinguished University of Florida Law Professor Roy Hunt. To watch the full interview with "Buddy Jacobs" follow the link on the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society website at <https://rawlingssociety.org/news-events/>

Note: In 1970 the University of Florida contracted with the State of Florida to take over management of the Rawlings property. The home and the property then became a state park. The property is also on the National Register of Historical Places and recognized as a National Historic Landmark.



IN MEMORIAM: CLAUDE JARMAN, THE PASSING OF JODY



Claude Miller Jarman, Jr.
(09/27/1934 - 01/12/2025)

Abridged from the *San Francisco Chronicle* and legacy.com

Claude Miller Jarman Jr. passed away peacefully at his home in Kentfield, CA, on Sunday, January 12th, at age 90. He was born on September 27, 1934, in Nashville, Tennessee, to Claude Jarman and Mildred Freeman Jarman. He was born an ordinary man and went on to live an extraordinary life.

He had a modest southern upbringing during The Depression. From a very young age, Claude acted in school plays. His cherub face, shock of blond hair, and bright blue eyes made him a standout in all his performances. One fateful day in his fifth grade classroom at the Eakin Elementary School, his life was forever changed. He was discovered on a Valentine's Day afternoon by the legendary Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) movie director, Clarence Brown. Brown had not had success in finding a boy to play the lead in his film adaptation of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Yearling*. He decided to fly his plane from Hollywood to the South to scour the elementary schools to find an unknown young, blonde-haired boy to play the part of Jody Baxter. Out of thousands of potential young boys, Brown had finally found his "Jody" in Claude.

At ten years old, Claude and his father took the train from Nashville to Hollywood. *The Yearling* took over two years to film on location in the "Big Scrub" country of Ocala, Florida. It was immensely challenging to make the movie due to intense heat, rain, and bugs. Claude could not wear shoes for months as he was barefoot for most of the filming. His on-camera parents, Gregory Peck and Jane Wyman, remained friends of Claude's for his entire life.

The Yearling was released at the end of 1946 to tremendous critical acclaim, with Claude's remarkable first-time performance being recognized by the Academy of Motion Pictures. He was presented with a rare Juvenile Academy Award by Shirley Temple at the 1947 Oscars. The film catapulted Claude into stardom, and his performance as the lonely boy who loved his deer was iconic. He went on to make ten more movies.



During his movie-making years he was educated at the MGM school on the studio lot. His classmates included the young stars Elizabeth Taylor, Margaret O'Brien, Roddy McDowall, and Jane Powell. Claude was one of the last actors of the studio system generation that many associate with the "Golden Age of Hollywood."

Well into his eighties, he was invited to speak about his memoir and his films at festivals and events around the country. He could recall his lines from *The Yearling*, from almost 70 years ago. In December of 2021, he travelled with family members to Cross Creek to celebrate the 75th anniversary of *The Yearling* movie with Friends of the Farm and the Rawlings Society members. Thank you and farewell, Jody.



Please join us for our
36TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

April 11-12, 2025

Amelia Island, Fernandina Beach, FL

At the Fernandina Woman's Club

Registration must be received by
April 2, 2025

Guest Speakers • Historic Harbor Cruise
Special Sessions • Banquet Dinner

Conference Registration is now open!

<https://rawlingssociety.org/conferences-upcoming>

Hotel information:

Hampton Inn and Suites Amelia
Island Historic Harbor Front 19
South 2nd Street Fernandina
Beach, FL 32034

See Conference link to obtain
reduced rate of \$198/night. The
cut-off date for this room rate is
Feb. 13, 2025.

Since 1988, the Rawlings Society has gathered to study, discuss, and share Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' renowned scholarly, relatable, lasting, and beloved work. The Society also presents programs about Rawlings' contemporaries and her influence today. This year's conference includes many interesting, exciting sessions and features **Trish O'Kane**, author of *Birding to Change the World: A Memoir*. Don't miss the fascinating **Buddy Jacobs** who was instrumental in helping to restore the MKR house at Cross Creek. **We look forward to you joining us!**



PO Box 117005
Gainesville, FL 32611-7005



IS IT TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

Please check your address label. The date that you see on the label is the date your dues are due.
If your membership is current, we thank you!

Membership and Conference Registration Prize

The Membership Year for the MKR Society is **July through June** corresponding with our programming, conference and publication cycle. ***Please take a good look at your mailing label to see if your renewal date has passed.*** If so, please consider renewing today using the membership form below or you can now renew on our website.

The person who signs up the most **new** members wins a FREE Registration for our next conference.

Here are some ideas to solicit members:

- Encourage friends and relatives to join;
- Give a gift of a student membership (\$15) to children, grandchildren, or other students;
- Speak to neighbors and those at your local library or historical society about joining.

Membership Application for the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society

Name: _____	Student	\$15	Sponsor	\$100
	Individual	\$30	Patron	\$250
Address: _____	Family	\$40	Benefactor	\$500
	Sustaining	\$50	Life	\$1,000
City/State/Zip: _____	(Please circle membership level)			
E-mail address: _____	Mail to: Rawlings Society c/o Anne Pierce 249 Herman Drive Hawthorne, FL 32640			

To learn more about the Society and information on the annual conference, visit our website, **www.rawlingssociety.org**