

# The



# Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings *Society*

# Newsletter

Volume XXXIV, Number 2

Fall 2025

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## President's Letter

### Is Rawlings a Regional Writer?

In 1970, National Historic Landmark status for the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park was *not* approved for the cited reasons:

Given [Rawlings'] regional literary reputation, accomplished in portraying the "cracker" culture of Northern Florida, demonstrating this significance might prove difficult. *The Dictionary of American Biography* notes: "Rawlings is not likely to go down in literary history either as a major American writer or a major writer of the depression era."

— Chief, National Historic Landmarks Survey Keeper, National Register of Historic Places (Letter, November 4, 2004)

Flo Turcotte, Anne Pierce, and I have been preparing our application for a Florida Historic Marker with the Florida Department of Historical Resources (DHR). It will be placed near the entrance of the state park. I found the letter quoted above in the files that the Florida Department of Historical Resources sent me. The park was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970. There are 95,000 sites which qualify for having national, regional, or local historic value. National Historic Landmark is a designation signifying national historic value, of which there are 2,500.

Elizabeth Silverthorne in her biography of Rawlings wrote, "She disliked characterizations of her writing as "regional," a term that often had dismissive overtones, and insisted that her writing strived to engage universal themes."

In 2005, Murray D. Laurie submitted a new application for National Historic Landmark status. People wrote in support, including both U.S. Senators, two Congressmen, and several university, state, and local authorities. Of greatest interest to us, the application was supported by Phil May Jr, Anna Lillios, Rodger Tarr, Roy Hunt, and William H. Jeter.

From the application: "Rodger Tarr notes that in her lecture, "Regional Literature of the South," delivered to the National Council of Teachers in 1940, Rawlings stressed that she wrote about the soul of humanity and that her efforts as a writer were to chronicle the human experience that has no boundaries. He quotes her close friend, Margaret Mitchell, who wrote to Rawlings, "Your versatility is a marvelous thing. There is no one today writing the way you write or the type of things you write. There have been all too few

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writers like you in the past. Yours is truly an American gift. You are a born perfect storyteller.” (Rodger Tarr, letter, "To the Attention of the Committee on National Landmarks," April 20, 2005.)

In September 2006, National Historic Landmark status was approved for the Rawlings Farm. One of the justifications cited by the National Park Service: “Marjorie Rawlings left a literary legacy that continued to flourish after her death in 1953. In the past decade, a wave of new scholarship has brought Rawlings increased critical recognition.”

It's official, Marjorie is a writer of national distinction. Of course, we already knew that.

Paul Dunn, President  
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society

## Hurston House – Zora Slept Here and You Can Too!

One of the literary landmarks of St. Augustine is the house where Zora Neale Hurston stayed in 1942 while completing her award-winning autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*. She taught in the summer session at the local Black college, Florida Normal (later Florida Memorial University), she had Marjorie Rawlings speak to her class, and they struck up a warm friendship, that inspired books like Anna Lillios’s *Crossing the Creek* and plays like Barbara Speisman’s *Tea with Zora and Marjorie*.

For three decades, the Hurston house at 791 West King Street was zealously guarded by Ms. Johnnie Pasco—who not once, but twice, turned down offers to build her a brand-new house if only she would let them demolish the historic Hurston house. Ms. Pasco died in 2022 at the age of 100, and worry grew about the fate of the building without its longtime guardian.

Fortunately, a young couple—Lavardis and Dwala Anderson—have purchased the property and made the necessary extensive repairs. They have decorated it with Hurston memorabilia, including an area focused on the friendship of Zora and Marjorie.

In the near future, it may be possible to stay in the rooms upstairs where Hurston and others lived in the 1940s—a unique treat that includes a “Zora Suite.”

For further information contact: <https://phoenixrisingnet.org>

—Contributed by David Nolan



The Andersons in the “Zora Suite”



Zora and Marjorie Exhibit



## Campers Bring *The Secret River* to Life, Honoring Philip S. May's Legacy

*Every child left with their own copy of *The Secret River* – and memories to last a lifetime!*

Green Cove Springs, FL – June 27, 2025

Dozens of children and grandparents gathered this summer for Finding the Secret River, a five-day intergenerational camp inspired by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' book *The Secret River*. Organized by the Village Improvement Association (VIA), the camp blended nature, storytelling, and arts education into a unique learning experience for all ages.

Huge thanks to Rawlings Society Trustee, **Sandi Dunnivant**, who was instrumental in championing this program, honoring the generous legacy of founder, Philip S. May. Inspired by Rawlings' book, *The Secret River*, children and grandparents celebrated nature, storytelling, and Florida's literary legacy through shared learning across generations.

Campers also explored Silver Springs by glass-bottom boat, toured the Clay County Courthouse, studied environmental conservation at Reparation Earth, and participated in outdoor activities at Van Zant Memorial Park. At every stop, connections were made between the themes of Rawlings' story and the rich natural and historical resources of Clay County.

One highlight was the gift of *The Secret River* books to each family, made possible by the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society. These books were read together during the week and taken home as keepsakes to encourage ongoing family reading.

The week concluded with a lively performance of *The Secret River* during the Augusta's Legacy Family Celebration on Saturday, August 2. Campers reenacted scenes from the book, while local children from the Augusta Savage Arts and Community Center shared original poetry, music, visual art, and dance. Though only the play was drawn directly from Rawlings' work, the entire celebration echoed the values she shared with sculptor Augusta Savage: a belief in the power of youth, education, and the arts to shape strong communities.

This program was part of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society's series of memorials honoring the Society's founder, Philip S. May Jr, whose vision was to introduce more people to Rawlings' work and lasting impact, including her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Yearling*. His generosity continues to bring Rawlings' voice into new communities.



—Contributed by Jennifer Campbell and Sandi Dunnivant

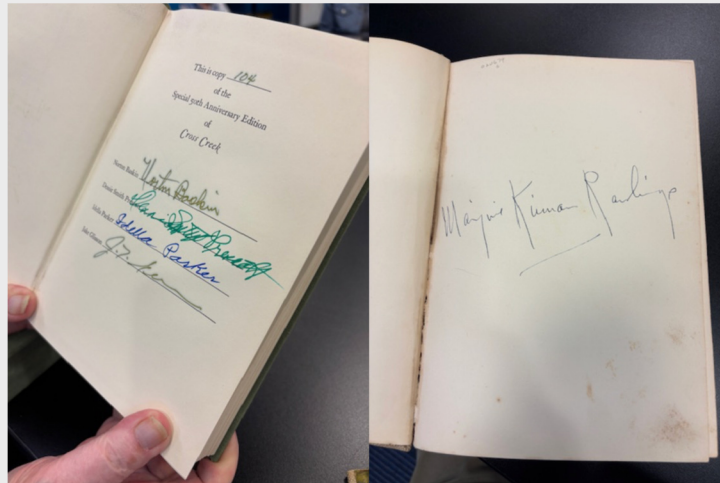


## A Month of Marjorie! Celebrating Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings at Summer's End

Palm Harbor, FL – August 2025

Rawlings Society trustees **Peter Cannon** and **Ashley Reese** have been busy this summer providing a series of innovative programs at the Palm Harbor Library.

The celebration of Rawlings' work kicked off with two book club discussions of Rawlings' *Short Stories* and *Cross Creek*. One trustee even kindly shared two very special copies of Marjorie's books: a 50th Anniversary Edition of *Cross Creek* signed by Norton Baskin, Dessie Prescott, Idella Parker, and J. T. Glisson, as well as a signed \*gulp\* copy of *The Yearling*.



The Palm Harbor Library's monthly cooking program "Let Us Cook" featured Marjorie's recipes from *Cross Creek Cookery*. This event was hosted by Palm Harbor's special librarian, Maryjane Hyatt. As a bonus, this event was attended by longtime MKR Society Trustee Margaret Harris and her friend Beverly Scheddel.



Maryjane Hyatt, librarian & chef



Beverly Scheddel and Margaret Harris

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# MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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(L to R) Peter Cannon, Ashley Reese

"An Afternoon with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings," a conversation about Rawlings' life, friends, and community, was moderated by Drs. Peter Cannon and Ashley Reese. This presentation was funded by the Rawlings Society's "Phil May Jr Memorial Lecture Series." In case you missed it, this event has been recorded, and you can view it here:

<https://youtu.be/rvMaS7Q9GRg>

The Month of Marjorie at the Palm Harbor Library closed with "Celebrating Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Through Music, Poetry, and Prose," a music and spoken word afternoon experience. Award-winning wordsmiths Cathy Salustri and Shana Smith provided the sounds of Cross Creek, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and her life there, with stories, poems, and songs.



(L to R) Shana Smith, Cathy Salustri

## Upcoming:

On Nov. 3 at 7 pm, join historian and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' Society trustee, **Casey Wooster**, for a talk on the sites and stories associated with Rawling's life in St. Augustine. This seminar is part of the Lifelong Learning/St. Augustine Historical Society speaker series at Flagler College, Markland House. Find out more at this link: <https://members.staughs.com/event-6282410>

**Marisella Veiga**, Rawlings Society member, is happy to report that her book's title *We Carry Our Homes with Us: A Cuban American Memoir* (2016) is part of a big celebration surrounding the 100th anniversary of the Freedom Tower in Miami this fall. The landmark building, originally headquarters of *The Miami News*, became a center that offered services in health care, finances, housing, education, and jobs for the more than 400,000 who went there after coming into exile, and The Freedom Tower, or *El Refugio*, remains a much-loved landmark. Veiga's book title is the name of one exhibit, and photos from her book will also be shown.





## *Pumping Sunshine: A Memoir of My Rural Childhood*

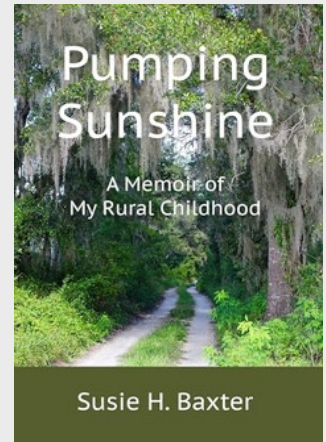
by Sue Baxter

(Review by Ashley Lear)

In her 2018 memoir, *Pumping Sunshine*, Rawlings Society member Susie H. Baxter details the day-to-day life of a farming family in 1940s-1950s rural Florida. Baxter, who teaches memoir writing at Santa Fe College, grew up on the banks of the Suwanee River in an area so densely backwoods one would need to “pump in sunshine.” From her extremely early memory of waking up in the middle of the night at age three certain there are snakes in her bed, to the death of her grandfather in 1956, Baxter details her life on a farm in a prefabricated home, from the rituals of weekly laundry and seasonal crops to the deep family connections that grew out of lives connected by necessity.

Detailed drawings of her and her grandparents’ homes reveal the simplicity of construction that came directly from Sears, Roebuck and Co., or in a set of construction plans that could be followed with purchased lumber. Baxter recalls how families in that time qualified for government assistance for electrical wiring based on the Rural Electrification Act of 1936. She shares her personal fears of using the outhouse, and embarrassment over an extended period of bedwetting that created additional challenges for a family without the luxury of modern-day laundry appliances.

Her life on the farm included hard work, from sugar cane processing and hog killing days that involved the whole community to planting tobacco together as a family. Baxter explores how the hard labors and lifestyle forged a physical closeness among family members and neighbors, resulting in strong, enduring relationships. The book invites readers to glimpse life in a rural schoolhouse, the fear of flooding from the Suwanee River, and the church lives of the community, including the excitement of a church revival and baptism in the river. Baxter even includes a number of recipes from her mother, updated to work with modern-day appliances so they can be enjoyed today. For those wishing to recall their own rural childhood or to experience them vicariously, Baxter’s memoir will not disappoint.



## Marjorie Travels!

On June 26, 2025, the Lynx Bookstore added a new book vending machine to the Gainesville Regional Airport. The vending machine features Florida writers like Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Ernest Hemingway, Karen Russell, and Judy Blume, showcasing the state’s rich literary history for the 500,000 visitors who pass through the airport each year.

“This is more than just a vending machine; it is a celebration of the rich cultural heritage of Florida. We want to counter the ‘Florida Man’ narrative that gives people an easy, superficial image of the state, and to show visitors to Gainesville that Florida’s literary legacy is powerful and deep,” said Lauren Groff in a press release.

The Lynx Bookstore, founded by three-time National Book Award finalist Lauren Groff and her husband, Clay Kallman, continues to build on its mission to celebrate the state’s literary tradition and make books accessible to everyone.





**37th Annual Conference**  
**Deland, Florida**  
**April 17 - 18, 2026**

## CALL FOR PAPERS

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, an organization of 200+ members worldwide, invites paper proposals on topics related to Rawlings' life and works.




### TOPICS RELATED TO RAWLINGS MAY INCLUDE:

- Rawlings' place in Modernist, American, and Southern Literature
- Her depictions of landscape, foodways, sex and gender roles, place, etc.
- *The Yearling* as a bildungsroman
- Ecocriticism and other themes found in her work
- Rawlings and Florida
- Her political attitudes and relationship with race
- Family, friends, publishers, and contemporaries of Rawlings
- Art and film, including adaptations, inspirations, etc.
- AND SO MUCH MORE . . .

Please send 1-2 page abstracts of 20 minute presentations to Dr. Ashley Lear, Executive Director of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, at [ashley.lear@erau.edu](mailto:ashley.lear@erau.edu) .

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: October 15, 2025**

FIND US:  [rawlingssociety.org](http://rawlingssociety.org)

  @mkr society  
 @rawlingssociety

### *In Memoriam*

**Nick Nader**, an early supporter of the Rawlings Society, passed away in St. Augustine on May 21, 2025, at the age of 99. His family ran a grocery store across from the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, and as one of the bright young men in town, he made it his business to meet the famous author. His autographed copy of one of her books was something he treasured – and displayed at the Ancient City's centennial celebration of Marjorie's birth in 1996.

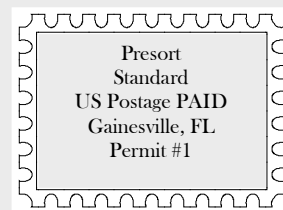
He also shared with Marjorie an interest in naturalist William Bartram, and was the last survivor of a group that originally marked Bartram sites in St. Augustine – leading to the later William Bartram Scenic Highway.

In recent years, he was a generous donor of items to the annual auction at the Rawlings Society Conference.

Rest in Peace, old friend.



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](http://www.rawlingssociety.org)**