

# The



# Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society

# Newsletter

Volume XXXIV, Number 4

Spring 2026

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## President's Letter

We recently had a rare hard freeze in Florida. It brings to mind Rawlings's stories of freezes in her grove. *Cross Creek, Golden Apples*, and numerous letters describe the precautions taken and impacts to citrus groves. Since then, north central Florida has seen the citrus industry move south due to too many freezes.

The low temperature here at my house in Fernandina Beach was 23.9 and it stayed below freezing for 12 hours. We are close to the ocean which moderates the temperature by several degrees, so you may have experienced colder temperatures. We have four citrus trees. We were able to pick the Meyer lemons and Kishu mandarins as they are early season which do best in north central Florida. Those trees are too big to cover. We have a Page orange and Persian lime that are small enough to cover with sheets. We place incandescent holiday lights around them to generate heat and cover them with sheets. We also use this method on tropical plants with good success. No smudge pots or bonfires here. It is too early to tell what kind of damage the citrus suffered. None of our outdoor datil peppers survived, but we have some in pots for this spring.

Most of our plants are native which we did not have to cover. Some died back but will return in the spring. We have reduced our water bill and mowing by using native plants. This has also attracted many birds and pollinators. We have seven painted buntings that visit daily from fall through spring.

The cold weather does bring an opportunity. We went on the most amazing boat ride on the St. Johns River. It is the same one you can sign up for at our upcoming conference. It was 52 degrees, drizzly, windy, and cold. Thankfully, it won't be that way in April.

The payoff for freezing was 852 manatees counted that day at Blue Spring run. It was truly amazing and we were so fortunate to see them. We had made the reservation weeks ago and were just lucky with the timing. The water temperature in the river was 56 degrees, and manatees cannot tolerate temperatures below 60, so they were

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seeking the 72-degree spring run. There is no vegetation in the spring run, so a few ventured out for short periods to feed.

It was too cold for turtles and alligators, but we saw many birds on the boat ride. The guide was great at pointing them out. We saw three groups of Limpkin babies which were so cute. Some of the other species sighted were American Bittern, Snail Kite, Great and Snowy Egrets, Great Blue, Little Blue, Tricolored and Green Herons. There were many more species, too numerous to mention here. The Snail Kites were trying to “steal” snails from the Limpkins and Herons.

I encourage all of you to attend our upcoming conference and to sign up for the boat ride. The conference is going to be very interesting and will be in a beautiful facility in downtown DeLand.

Paul Dunn, President  
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society

**37th Annual Conference**  
of the  
**Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society**

**April 17-18, 2026**  
**Northwest Square**  
**238 N Clara Ave., DeLand, FL**

Since 1988, the 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.

**Dynamic Guest Speakers**  
**Musical Evening • River Cruise**

 Scan for conference registration and hotel discounts (block rates close March 17) 

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## Honorable Changes

Careful readers of the front page of this newsletter will notice some changes. Two new names now appear as lifetime honorary trustees:

**Sally Baskin Hooker** is the niece of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Norton Baskin. She lives in Trenton, Florida.

**Marsha Dean Phelts** is the celebrated scribe of American Beach and a past president of the Rawlings Society.

**Shirley “Daisy” Thompson** is now a trustee emerita. “Daisy” is a beloved St. Augustinian, has been a Rawlings Society trustee for many decades, master gardener, and general ray of light.

We thank them for decades of active service to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society and cherish our continued connection with them in their new roles



### Recognition for the Traphagen Farmhouse, Restoration of the Traphagen/Kinnan Gravestones

Society members may recall that in 2022, I was contacted by Terri and Mark Ridenhour, who had purchased and were restoring the 1877 farmhouse of Abram and Fanny Traphagen, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s maternal grandparents. The farmhouse is in Holly, Michigan, near the larger town of Fenton, about an hour north of Ann Arbor. Marjorie’s mother, Ida, grew up in this house, and Marjorie visited it numerous times during her childhood and early adulthood. She wrote of it in letters, and in *Blood of My Blood*. And she based the hero of *The Sojourner*, Ase Linden, on her grandfather Abram.

In April 2023, I made a presentation on the house and its restoration at the annual conference, and that fall, I went up to Michigan to meet Terri and Mark and tour the house and property. Together we found in Fenton, Michigan’s, Oakwood cemetery the modest gravestones of Abram, Fanny, Ida, and Marjorie’s father, Arthur Kinnan. We noted they needed restoration.

Since then, Terri and Mark have continued to keep in touch with me, sending photos of restored, renovated rooms. (This is their “retirement” project and they intend to stay. One of their sons – after recovering from the news that his parents would take on such a venture in their 60s – has moved close by, with his family.) The Ridenhours have expressed high interest in displaying a commemorative Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings plaque on the farmhouse and serving as local contacts for the headstone restoration. In January, the Trustees voted to fund the plaque and gravestone work, and I agreed to lead the task.

As soon as the project was approved, I contacted the city of Fenton and was referred to Doug Tebo, chairman of the Oakwood Cemetery Board, who, together with his son, maintains headstones at Oakwood cemetery as a volunteer. He knows where the Traphagen/Kinnan stones are and will take a look in early April, when the ground has thawed. If a monument company needs to assist with the restoration (which I suspect, especially for the Kinnan stones) he will let me know and we’ll go from there.

Doug said that a member of one of the local historical societies (Fenton or Holly) knows the significance of the Traphagens and the connection to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. It’s possible that when the time comes to recognize the plaque and restored gravestones, this group will be involved. Stay tuned.

– Contributed by Ann McCutchan



Fannie and Abram Traphagen gravestones



Ida and Arthur’s stones – Arthur’s name on flip side, submerged



## Donna Green-Townsend Remembers Claude Jarman

*These remarks were given by Donna Green-Townsend, Vice-President of the Board of Directors, Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc. at the Celebration of Life for Claude Jarman, Jr. held on Feb. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026 in San Francisco, CA. This transcript is printed courtesy of the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm which sponsored Donna's participation in this event.*

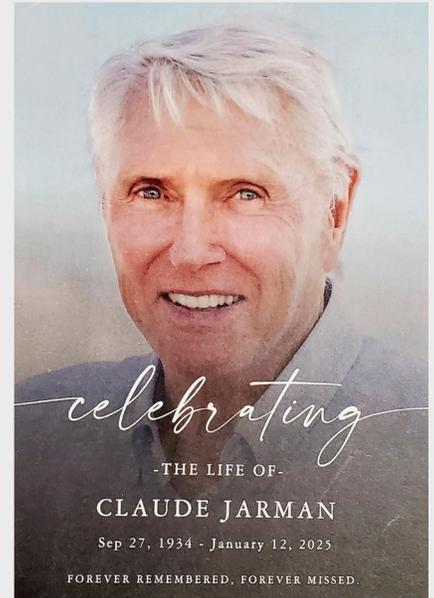
Good morning. I'm Donna Green-Townsend. Katie (Jarman), thanks for inviting me to speak this morning. I've been a journalist for more than 50 years. I currently serve as the Vice-President of the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm in Florida.

It's been nearly 100 years since, as a young journalist, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings moved to the rural fishing community of Cross Creek, Florida where she purchased an orange grove and house, sight unseen. Within 10 years she wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning novel based on a true story that changed the life of the man we are celebrating today.

The novel *The Yearling*, and the MGM movie with the same name, tells the story about a Cracker family struggling to make a living in the "Big Scrub" of the Ocala National Forest in Marion County, Florida. The family faced a tough decision when their only surviving child, Little Jody Baxter, had to decide between his pet fawn or the family's food supply when the deer continued to eat their crops.

It was providence that the noted Director Clarence Brown from Tennessee hand-picked ten-year old Claude Jarman for the role of young Jody...beating out more than 19,000 other young boys who wanted the part. It was providence that Kathlyne Walkup Sheppard, my co-producer for a documentary I was producing on the making of the movie, grew up in the mid-1940s in the same Ocala National Forest. Providence that her brother-in-law caught many of the fawns for the film. Providence that other relatives of hers served as doubles for the key actors Claude Jarman and Gregory Peck or others who served as set builders in 1945. It was providence that because Kathy went on a tour of the Rawlings home in Cross Creek where I live and that she would meet my park ranger husband who then shared her contact information with me that then set in motion our effort to record incredible oral histories....and providence that she would wonder aloud if Claude Jarman was still alive to share his story. He was.

Because of Covid I interviewed Claude by Zoom in April of 2021. In that first interview he shared the most wonderful memories of filming in the forest, about the bear hunt for 'Ole Slewfoot, his memories of working with the actor who played the character of Fodderwing, what it was like working with director Clarence Brown, and the harshness of filming in the summer heat of Florida with the rain and bugs in the summer of 1945.



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Claude and Katie agreed to come to Florida for an additional interview and celebration on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the premier of the Oscar-nominated MGM movie. I interviewed Claude on the stage at the Marion Theatre in Ocala just before a showing of the original *Yearling* movie on the big screen. Katie and Claude generously gave their time during that trip to meet the park staff at the Marjorie Rawlings historic home. They took a glass bottom boat tour on the Silver River, the river that Claude had gone on when he was a young boy during the filming in Florida. They ate at the Yearling Restaurant and they signed copies of *The Yearling* book.

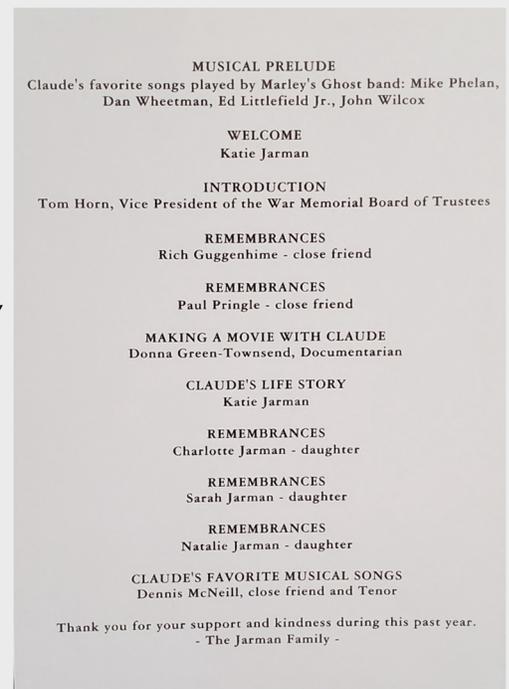
As work on our documentary continued over the next year, Claude and Katie generously donated photos to me. They even wrote a letter on my behalf to famous documentary producer Ken Burns trying to help me get film clips from the movie. Around 2023, our documentary called *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida* about the making of the original film was complete. It was offered to public television stations around the country. PBS stations in 42 states have aired the program. It is still available for viewing on PBS.org.

I think one of the key reasons why after 80 years people care about this story of a boy and his pet deer and why it continues to be so popular is because of the talented portrayal projected on the screen by Claude in his very first professional acting job and how he shared his deepest grief as he was forced to shoot his pet to save their family's food supply. As Claude wrote in his book, *My Life and the Final Days of Hollywood*, when Claude cried on film Gregory Peck said, "it changed the whole nature of the picture." As you all know he won an Oscar for that role.

I'm so glad I got to know both Katie and Claude and am honored to be here. This is a little side story that I think is important to hear because it shows his humility and graciousness. Less than a year before Claude passed away, he sent a birthday card to the man who was his stand-in in the movie, Bobby Randall. Bobby was in a nursing facility having kidney dialysis treatment three days a week. In his small room by his bedside, he had a 5 by 7 framed photo of him and Claude when they saw each other again for the first time after 75 years. Five months after Claude passed away, Bobby Randall also passed away. I will never forget how gracious it was that Claude made Bobby so happy because being Claude's stand-in was the highlight of his life.

The story of *The Yearling* continues to be one of the most beloved stories in the world...and I know in my soul that Claude's portrayal of young Jody has helped to make that so. And as Claude told me in my interview with him in 2021, he "became that little boy." I'm so honored to be here. Thank you, Katie.

For more information about the documentary, *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida*, visit here: [marjoriekinnanrawlings.org](http://marjoriekinnanrawlings.org).





## A Cosmic Horror Writer in Old Florida: H. P. Lovecraft's DeLand Connection

Visitors to Cross Creek can still walk the rooms where Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings wrote *The Yearling*, her home preserved in a state park and beloved by readers and fans of natural Florida. About an hour away, down quiet roads southwest of DeLand, stands a different kind of literary site: a weathered wooden house near the community of Cassia. It isn't a park or a museum. Most passersby would never guess that, for two summers in the 1930s, it hosted one of the twentieth century's most influential writers of the strange and uncanny.

The guest was H. P. Lovecraft, the New England-based creator of cosmic horror, whose stories of ancient gods and indifferent universes helped shape modern fantasy, science fiction, and generations of writers, from Stephen King to today's filmmakers and game designers. "Now that time has given us some perspective on his work," King has written, "I think it is beyond doubt that H. P. Lovecraft has yet to be surpassed as the twentieth century's greatest practitioner of the classic horror tale."



H.P. Lovecraft in 1934

Lovecraft is often remembered as a recluse, hunched over his desk in Providence. Yet in his later years, he traveled more than that image suggests. Somewhat improbably, sunny central Florida became one of his favorite refuges.

By the early 1930s, Lovecraft was making a precarious living through correspondence, revision work, and publications in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. He wrote thousands of letters and formed friendships through the mail with younger writers and fans. One of them was Robert H. Barlow, an unusually gifted teenager whose family had settled on a lakeside property in the pinewoods at the edge of Volusia and Lake County.

Barlow was a printer, bookbinder, and an aspiring author – the kind of earnest literary young person who built his own press in a shed and set type by hand. Through letters, he invited Lovecraft south to escape the New England cold. In 1934 and again in 1935, Lovecraft accepted.

For a writer so associated with gloom and shadow, Florida offered something like sunlight therapy. In letters to friends, Lovecraft described the heat and brightness with delight, saying he felt "like a new person – as spry as a youth." He went hatless and coatless. He walked sandy roads, rowed on the lake, and lingered outdoors beneath pines and cypress. The landscape was less haunted mansion and more Old Florida postcard.

Daily life at the Barlow homestead was simple and domestic. Lovecraft and Barlow talked endlessly about books and stories. They gathered berries, explored the woods, and collaborated on small printing projects. At Barlow's tiny Dragon-Fly Press, they hand-set type for limited editions,

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including one of Lovecraft's tales, "The Cats of Ulthar." For a writer whose work would later inspire a vast commercial industry of paperbacks and collectibles, the image is homespun: Lovecraft in shirtsleeves, placing letters into a composing stick in a lakeside shack.

Modern readers sometimes pause at the age difference between the two. Barlow was only sixteen when he first hosted Lovecraft in 1934; Lovecraft was in his forties. By most accounts, however, their bond revolved around shared literary enthusiasm – manuscripts, printing, and conversations about the craft of storytelling. Lovecraft came away deeply impressed with Barlow's intellect and dedication, eventually naming him literary executor of his estate.

Barlow's own life would prove remarkable. After Lovecraft's death, he pursued anthropology, moved to Mexico, and became a respected scholar of Mesoamerican history and language, publishing widely and helping preserve Indigenous texts. The shy Florida teen with the backyard press grew into a serious academic voice – one more unexpected thread connecting this quiet corner of Volusia County to a much larger cultural story.

Today, the Cassia house still stands, though time has not been kind to it. Unlike Rawlings's lovingly maintained home at Cross Creek, it is easy to miss, remembered today mostly through online communities devoted to Lovecraft. Yet the house represents a different side of Florida's literary heritage: not the celebrated works composed in a Big Scrub farmhouse, but an odd, serendipitous stop along a reclusive writer's wandering path.

If Rawlings's legacy reminds us that Florida has nurtured great storytelling, Lovecraft's visits suggest something else – that the state has long served as a place of respite and reinvention. Even a writer of cosmic dread could find comfort here, rowing on a small lake and talking books beneath the pines.

It's a footnote in literary history perhaps, but proof that the byways around DeLand have hosted not only orange groves and tourists but also a dreamer of other worlds. Readers interested in learning more about Lovecraft's Florida sojourns might enjoy Paul La Farge's 2017 essay in *The New Yorker*, "The Complicated Friendship of H. P. Lovecraft and Robert Barlow, One of His Biggest Fans," and David Goudsward's recent book, *Adventurous Liberation: H. P. Lovecraft in Florida*, which traces the author's travels across the state.



The "Lovecraft House" today in Cassia, Florida

– Contributed by Joy Wallace Dickinson



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**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: _____	<i>(Please circle membership level)</i>			
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.rawlingsociety.org](http://www.rawlingsociety.org)