

News from the Creek

Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.

Volume 24 Number 4

Visit our website at: www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org

Fall Quarterly 2021

President's Message

by Barbara Wingo

Looking Forward
Looking Back



I am happy to report that we had a very successful birthday party for Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in August, which included the trail sign dedication. A preview interview with Claude Jarman, Jr., who played Jody in the motion picture version of *The Yearling*, was also shown.

Summer is now over: it is fall at the Creek. Rawlings described fall in *Cross Creek*:

The sky is a glaring blue, too blue and cloudless, the redbirds no longer sing, the rank summer vegetation turns sere, and the sun goes down in a burning ball. The sand is powder and a fine dust rises from it and coats the roadside bushes. In a temperate climate, this would be a part of summer. Here, it means summer's end.

This description reminds me of Rawlings' reaction to one of the very few criticisms of the motion picture *The Yearling*, which was such a critical and popular success. The Technicolor was too brilliant said one reviewer. Rawlings, who was generally pleased with the motion picture, responded "that the 'too blue sky' and 'too bright sand' were made by God and not by MGM." (Elizabeth Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Sojourner at Cross Creek*, p. 275.)

This brings us to our events on December 11 and 12: *The Yearling* Movie Celebrates 75 Years, with Claude Jarman, Jr. Please see the announcements and article about these events on pages 3, 6 and 7 of this newsletter. These are truly once-in-a-lifetime events.

Also please put on your calendar our annual meeting (article on page 2) on Saturday, November 20 at 1:00 p.m. An added bonus: stay for the resumption of the park's Writer's Talks at 2:00 p.m. (more details page 2). The featured writer will be Ann McCutchan, author of the recently published *The Life She Wished to Live: A Biography of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Author of The Yearling*. It is worth noting that McCutchan will also appear at the Matheson History Museum in Gainesville at 7:00 p.m. on November 19. In addition she will speak at the Whitney Laboratory in Marineland (near St. Augustine) at 7:00 p.m. on November 21. Her book will be for sale for \$35 at these events, all of which are free and open to the public.

I am so pleased to announce the development of a new website for the Friends, which has just debuted online at the same address as our previous website, www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org. You now will be able to join, donate and register (buy tickets) for events on our website. (Please note an exception for our December 12 event: those tickets must be purchased directly from the Marion Theatre in Ocala at mariontheatre.org.) You will now be able to make payments by credit card or check for memberships, donations and registrations (tickets). The website (in addition to our Facebook page) is also the place to check for any changes to the events described in this newsletter, including any changes needed because of the pandemic.

In any event, it is my sincere hope that I will see you at all of our events in November and December. As always, please stay safe and stay well.

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A Wonderful Birthday Party

A great time was had by all at Marjorie’s 125th Birthday Party on August 7! The dedication of the Rawlings quotations/Carson sketches trail signs was accomplished with aplomb, aided by the visit of Florida State Parks Director Eric Draper. We recognized board members Donna Green-Townsend and Anne Pierce and enjoyed cake and Marjorie’s mango ice cream. We viewed an interview of Claude Jarman, Jr., who played Jody in the motion picture version of *The Yearling* - which certainly whetted our appetite for the in-person interview we will present on December 12. The only bitter-sweet moment was to wish our departing park manager Scott Spaulding bon voyage and a great retirement. We had the privilege of viewing a video presentation highlighting Scott’s accomplishments over the years.



(left to right)
Barbara Wingo, Elaine Carson Spencer,
Park Manager Scott Spaulding and
Florida State Parks Director Eric Draper



Ann McCutchan

Writer’s Talks Return

by Park Ranger Geoff Gates

After many months, after being asked many times, I can finally say that yes, the very popular Writer’s Talks series will soon return to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park. The kickoff is scheduled for Saturday, November 20 at 2:00 p.m., and it will be a unique kind of homecoming: Ann McCutchan with her long anticipated, richly detailed, often revealing, sometimes intensely poignant biography of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings herself, *The Life She Wished to Live*. Dwight Garner of the *New York Times* says: “Come to this biography for Rawlings’ outsized personality. Stay for a portrait of a woman whose writing meant everything to her.” We hope you all come back for more Writer’s Talks in January, February and March. Come to hear Florida history, memoirs and cracker tales or contemporary fiction in the shade of the magnolia tree, almost in the shadow of the Pulitzer Prize winner’s house. Stay to chat with the authors and those who love writing or the fiddle music or the pound cake. And as I said at the beginning of the first Writer’s Talks, which seems so long ago, “I just know Marjorie would be so happy with all of this.”

The Friends’ Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., will be held Saturday, November 20, at 1:00 p.m., at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park. Following the usual business of the corporation, the president’s report, the park manager’s report, the annual financial report and the introduction of the officers for 2022, will be a brief presentation on the founding of the park 50+1 years ago.

An extra incentive to attend will be refreshments and the resumption of the park’s Writer’s Talks at 2:00 p.m. with Ann McCutchan, the author of *The Life She Wished to Live: A Biography of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Author of The Yearling*. Yet another incentive is that McCutchan’s book will be available for sale (\$35, cash or check only) and signing at the event.

We hope to see Friends and guests at the annual meeting and the Writer’s Talk.

The Yearling Movie Celebrates 75 Years

December 2021 marks the 75th anniversary of the premiere of the motion picture *The Yearling*. The motion picture, based upon Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that has since become an American classic, was a critical and popular success. The story of a boy's coming of age in the Florida wilderness in the post-Civil War period, it received seven Oscar nominations: Best Actor (Gregory Peck); Best Actress (Jane Wyman); Best Director (Clarence Brown); Best Motion Picture; Best Art Direction (Color); and Best Cinematography (Color). It won in the Best Art Direction and Best Cinematography (Color) categories. Claude Jarman, Jr., who played the boy Jody, won a special Academy Juvenile Award.

To celebrate this anniversary the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., is planning a once-in-a-lifetime celebration. Our special guest will be Claude Jarman, Jr.



Marion Theatre

On Sunday, December 12, *The Yearling* will be shown at the Marion Theatre in Ocala. This 1946 Technicolor movie will be shown most appropriately on the "big screen" in a 1940s theater. And there is more. Following the showing of the movie, Claude Jarman, Jr., will be interviewed on stage. Much of *The Yearling* was filmed in the Florida scrub in what is now called the Ocala National Forest. Among the memories that Jarman will share are those of the Florida filming. And there is even more: Jarman's recent autobiography *My Life and the Final Days of Hollywood* will be on sale (\$25, cash or check only) and available for signing at the event.

The Yearling will begin at 1:30 p.m., followed by the in-person Jarman interview. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. Tickets (Adults, \$15.00; Children under 12, \$10) may be purchased through the Marion Theatre box office: mariontheatre.org. A truly unique opportunity: you will see the motion picture as it was meant to be seen - in a 1940s movie house on the big screen. You will be able to hear Jarman's insights on the film. And the proceeds will benefit the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park.

Also part of this celebration: on Saturday, December 11, the Friends will hold a reception for Claude Jarman, Jr., at the Dancing Cows Ranch in Cross Creek (14707 S. CR 325), from 1:00-4:00 p.m. *The Yearling* memorabilia and decorations will be on display, and Florida refreshments will be served. A preview of a presentation on Florida memories of the filming of *The Yearling* will be presented. This presentation will include portions of interviews of local participants in the filming and their relatives. Among those interviewed are Bobby Randall, Jarman's double/stand in; Lawrence Kinsey and Richard Mills, who worked on the set; and relatives of other participants in the project, such as Alva Dame Kinsey, whose father was Gregory Peck's double/stand in. Registration for the reception is on our website marjoriekinnanrawlings.org. The cost is \$30 for members of the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., and \$35 for non-members. Proceeds will benefit the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park.



Presented by the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.

Tickets to both events are limited so buy yours soon.
 Tickets for the movie and Claude Jarman, Jr. interview: mariontheatre.org,
 Tickets (registration) for the reception, marjoriekinnanrawlings.org.

Filming *The Yearling*: “Debacle” and Success

by Barbara Wingo

In June of 1941 Marjorie wrote to her good friend Beatrice (Bee) McNeill: “Well, the movie business certainly turned out a mess. They spent half a million dollars here, seemed to have a perfect set-up, and suddenly cleared out at a moment’s notice after a week or so’s work. Nobody seems to know just what was the trouble.” She continued:

I was only on the set twice, and I could tell Fleming [Victor Fleming, the director] wasn’t satisfied with Anne Revere [playing Ma Baxter] or the boy. . . . The boy Gene Eckman [playing Jody], in looks and personality, seemed quite all right, but the sound man had me listen in, and it was true, as he complained, that the boy was not enunciating, and his lines were not registering. [Spencer] Tracy [playing Penny Baxter] was bored and morose, Anne Revere is not Ma Baxter as I visualize her, but had a fine pioneer look and I thought she was all right, but she didn’t seem to “put out” emotionally in the one scene I saw her do. We do know that there was much dissention, labor trouble, etc. . . . At any rate, Fleming is out as director and King Vidor in, Anne Revere and Gene Eckman out, and the word is that the picture will be shelved, whether permanently or not I don’t know. . . . I for one don’t care if they never do it at all! (Bigelow & Monti, *Selected Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, pp. 204-206.)



Fleming filming: Rawlings on set
Courtesy UF Libraries

Fortunately for us, filming was resumed under director Clarence Brown four years later, and a motion picture of *The Yearling* was finally completed – even though filming in Florida remained difficult. We are also fortunate to have extant reminiscences of the Fleming filming and of the later Clarence Brown filming as well as excellent and well-researched summaries of these activities in Michael Sragow’s *Victor Fleming: An American Movie Master* and Gwenda Young’s *Clarence Brown: Hollywood’s Forgotten Master*.

Let us begin the story with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s purchase of the motion picture rights to *The Yearling* for \$30,000 in May of 1938. The project became mired in script problems, and, because director Victor Fleming was busy rescuing *Gone with the Wind*, the project was assigned to Norman Taurig. Eventually Fleming was back in charge, and, because the original actor cast as Jody had outgrown the role, a talent search was instituted. MGM talent scout Billy Grady found Gene Eckman in Atlanta.

An advance crew came to Ocala, Florida, building a set that represented Baxter’s Island, the scene of the story, followed by a second unit in mid-January 1941, assigned by the director to make atmospheric shots of the Florida landscape as well as scenes with animals. Taking these shots was time-consuming and exacerbated mightily by Florida weather and the logistics of filming in Technicolor. Script Clerk Wally Worsley remembered one of the shoots:

We needed many sunrises and sunsets, and often it would take many tries to get even one that was satisfactory. . . . At that time of year, the sun rose at 7:00 A.M., so we would get up at 4:30, load the camera equipment in a small truck, then drive in four cars to the swamp, that took about an hour. The equipment would be unloaded into rowboats and taken to the island, where a camera platform had been constructed. The camera would be set up and we would wait for the sunrise. The sun would come up and be unsatisfactory, and we would strike the camera. (*From Oz to E.T.: Wally Worsley’s Half-Century in Hollywood*, p. 33.)

Even though many of these shots did end up in the final motion picture and contributed mightily to the cinematography, everyone underestimated the Florida environment – as was again to be the case with the Clarence Brown-directed filming.

The second unit also was assigned to film the bear hunting scene – the confrontation between Old Slewfoot, Jody and his father. As Worsley recalled, the scene had to be done in many cuts with an avenue of iron fencing, masked with woven vines and a fenced corral at the end. It took two or three days to get a 150-foot section ready for shooting and, thus, many weeks “to get to the climactic scene in which the bear is finally cornered by the hounds and shot.” By that time the weather

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was considerably hotter than in January when the process had begun, and the bear costume was too much for the actor playing the bear: he collapsed from the heat. (*From Oz to E.T.*, p. 35.)

Fleming and the cast arrived at the end of April and beginning of May. Marjorie liked Eckman, the boy playing Jody, and Spencer Tracy appeared content. But the lodgings were marginal. Air conditioning had to be ordered. A road was built for all the vehicles necessary to transport the equipment, crew and cast to the location. But cattle on the road were dangerous obstacles.

Tracy became discontented with the lodgings, the weather and ultimately the part and the boy. As Rawlings noted, crew dissension and labor troubles added to the challenges of filming. Fleming shut the production down and returned to California on May 19. Although King Vidor was announced as the new director, the picture was shelved.

The producer, Sidney Franklin, was persistent in his desire to film *The Yearling*, and the project was revived in 1945 with Clarence Brown as the director. A new cast was also engaged. We will be privileged to hear first-hand the reminiscences of Claude Jarman, Jr., Clarence Brown's "discovery" to play the part of Jody at our event on December 12. In fact, Brown became a mentor and almost a father figure to Jarman during the shooting of the movie. Jarman's memories have also been set forth in his autobiography, *My Life and the Final Days of Hollywood*, which we will be selling at the December 12 movie screening and interview. In addition to Claude Jarman, Jr., as Jody, the relative newcomer Gregory Peck was cast as Penny Baxter and a new starlet Jacqueline White as Ma Baxter.



Brown filming: Bobby Randall, Claude Jarman, Jr.'s double/stand-in
Courtesy Bobby Randall



Brown filming:
Claude Jarman, Jr. (right) and his
double/stand-in Bobby Randall
Courtesy Bobby Randall

The new cast and crew came to Florida in April of 1945. While Rawlings had actively participated in the Fleming endeavor, she took a hands-off approach in this renewed endeavor. The Florida environment, however, remained the same: no kinder to Brown's company than it had been to Fleming's, much to the amusement and chagrin of the local population and Hollywood observers. Brown himself stated that the experience in Florida was the worst shoot that he ever endured with the "heat and rattlesnakes and mosquitoes" taking their toll. (Quoted in Young, *Clarence Brown: Hollywood's Forgotten Master*, p. 275.)

In addition to working extensively with Jarman, Brown had to contend with animals, primarily the deer, which, as Fleming had discovered, did not readily take direction. Photography was difficult. One of the photographers remembered that in the brief moments when the smoke lifted, the rain would begin to fall. These conditions limited the obtaining of viable footage. On the other hand, the stint in Florida did allow Peck and Jarman to become accustomed to their roles. Unfortunately, that was not the case with Jacqueline White, who in any event had not impressed Rawlings as suitable for the role of Ma Baxter. Upon the company's return to California, Jane Wyman replaced her.

One of the scenes actually and finally filmed in Florida was that of the bear hunt. Jean Kent in *Movie Show* (January 1947) described the complexities of the filming. Mark Weatherway, the dog trainer, unleashed three dogs, "Feist," a black and white terrier, 'Rip,' a big buff-colored dog that must have had some St. Bernard blood in him, and 'Julie,' a long reddish flop-eared hound. They wagged their tails as their friend Greg [Peck] approached." Kent continued:

The cameras started grinding. Julie saw the meat [held by Mack Weatherway], broke away from the trainer's hand, and plunged down the path in the direction Mack had taken. Rip and Feist were set free. They saw Julie, bounded after her, with Peck hot on their trail. Dogs and hunters disappeared into the hammock. For several minutes, their shrill yaps rang through the still Florida heat.

(Continued on page 6)

**Join the Friends of the
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.,
for a one-time showing of the original
The Yearling
movie with Gregory Peck, Jane Wyman,
and Claude Jarman, Jr., as “Jody”**



*The Yearling Movie Celebrates
75 Years
with Claude Jarman, Jr.*

**An on-stage interview with
Claude Jarman, Jr.,
will follow the movie showing.**

**Sunday, December 12 at 1:30 p.m.
Marion Theatre
50 S. Magnolia Avenue
Ocala, FL 35571**

**Doors open at 12:30 p.m.
Tickets - Adults \$15/Children \$10**

**Tickets sold through
www.mariontheatre.org
Proceeds benefit the Marjorie Kinnan
Rawlings Historic State Park**

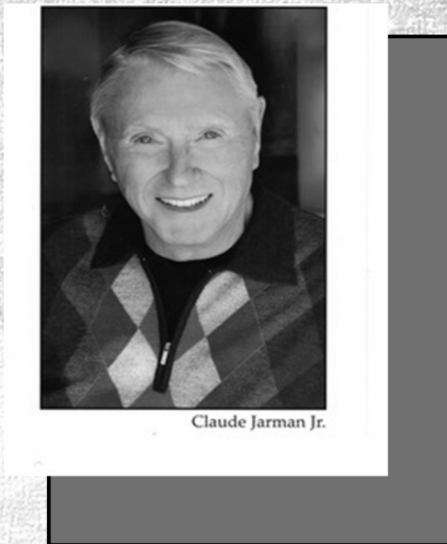
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If this was a bear chase, Kent asked, where was the bear? The answer was: the bear was working on another set. The bear run was filmed separately, and it was difficult since the bear was not exactly cooperative. That left the actual fight, and this time the actor playing the bear did not collapse from the heat. The dogs were trained especially for the scene: “by the time the scene was shot, they had learned to attack the parts of the body indicated before the camera started grinding.”

After four months in Florida the cast and crew returned to California to finish the filming - which took several more months on yet another set which replicated Baxter’s Island (but now in California) and that also included location shooting at Lake Arrowhead. The second unit returned to Florida for a month mainly to film long shots of the surroundings. The result was the acclaimed and very popular motion picture *The Yearling*, premiering in December of 1946, seven and a half years after the original work on the motion picture had begun.

Meet Claude Jarman, Jr., "Jody Baxter" from
The Yearling movie.

reception



Saturday, December 11 from 1-4 p.m.
Dancing Cows Ranch in Cross Creek

- ❖ *The Yearling* movie memorabilia will be on display.
- ❖ Preview of a presentation on Florida memories of the filming of the motion picture by participants
- ❖ Florida-themed refreshments and décor

Registration (tickets) are \$30 for Friends members,
\$35 for non-members through
www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org

Proceeds benefit the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings
Historic State Park.

Claude Jarman, Jr.

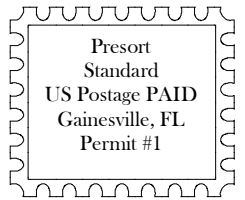
Discovered by director Clarence Brown in Nashville, Tennessee, to play the part of Jody in *The Yearling*, Claude Jarman, Jr., won a juvenile Oscar for that performance. He appeared in an additional ten motion pictures, including *Intruder in the Dust*, based on a novel by William Faulkner, and *Rio Grande*, in which he played the son of John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. He retired from motion pictures in 1956 at the age of 21, but returned to the motion picture world as the director of the San Francisco International Film Festival in 1965. His reminiscences have recently been published in *My Life and the Final Days of Hollywood*.

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Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.
 P.O. Box 337
 Micanopy, FL 32667-0337



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.
 Visit www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org to join or renew or you may fill out and send a check with the form below.
 If your membership is current, we thank you!

Mark Your Calendar!

Saturday, November 20	Annual Meeting:	1p.m., Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park (pg. 2)
Saturday, November 20	Writer's Talk:	2 p.m., Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park Featuring writer Anne McCutchan (pg. 2)
Saturday, December 11	Reception:	1- 4 p.m., Dancing Cows Ranch, Cross Creek Meet Claude Jarman, Jr., "Jody Baxter" from <i>The Yearling</i> (pages 3, 7)
Sunday, December 12	One time showing of the Original Movie <i>The Yearling</i> with in-person interview with Claude Jarman, Jr.:	Marion Theatre, Ocala 1:30 p.m. showing/doors open at 12:30 (pages 3 and 6)

Membership Information

Effective September 1, 2021 new membership dues are as follows

Type	1yr	3yr	5yr	10yr	Lifetime
Individual	\$30	\$85	\$140	\$270	\$ 500
Family	\$35	\$100	\$165	\$320	\$ 600
Educational	\$35	\$100	\$165	\$320	\$ 600
Corporate	\$60	\$175	\$290	\$570	\$1,000

Effective 9/1/2021

Please circle type of membership and send with your check to:
Friends of the MKRawlings Farm, Inc.
 P.O. Box 337
 Micanopy, FL 32667-0337

or visit our website at marjoriekinnanrawlings.org
 to join or renew your membership online

Membership in the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.

We invite you to join or renew your membership in the Citizen Support Organization (CSO) for the MKR Historic State Park. Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax deductible. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Division of Consumer Services by calling 1-800-435-7352 (toll-free within Florida). Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Comments:

Please Note: Our dues structure was updated September 2021