



News from the Creek

Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.

Volume 26 Number 3

Visit our website at: www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org

Summer Quarterly 2023

President's Message

By Donna Green-Townsend



Summer has descended upon the Creek in full force. Here's how Marjorie described summer in *Cross Creek*:

"Folk who have never known a tropical summer have never luxuriated in indolence, while the world around them burst out of its sheath in a mad exuberance of growth. It is at the Creek as though Nature said to us, "You have toiled for me, now rest quietly in the shade, and the sun and rain and I will do all that is needed."



This summer we are very excited to announce a couple of key events sponsored by the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm. Mark your calendars for our annual Marjorie Rawlings Birthday Celebration at the farm in Cross Creek on Saturday, August 5th from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. with all the birthday fixins of cake, ice cream and music. The event is free with just a small entry fee at the park entrance.

On August 8th at 9 p.m., plan to tune in to WUFT-TV, Channel 5, for our long-awaited documentary, *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida*. The one-hour program takes an inside look at the classic movie as well as the Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel which inspired the film. The documentary has also been made available to more than 350 PBS stations across the country by the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA).

The documentary includes extensive interview segments with Oscar winner Claude Jarman, Jr., who played young Jody Baxter in the MGM film. Memories from Florida residents who served as stand-ins for Gregory Peck and Jarman, as well as some of the folks who worked on the movie set in the "Big Scrub," are also featured. The Gregory Peck Foundation provided home movie clips recorded by Gregory Peck while he was in Florida filming *The Yearling* in 1945.



Leonard Fiddia

Now for an interesting twist to this article.... *The Yearling* movie, and more importantly, the novel, may never have happened if it hadn't been for Leonard Fiddia. Marjorie Rawlings met Leonard Fiddia in either 1929 or 1930 while on a hunting trip with a mutual friend. It was Leonard Fiddia who introduced her to Calvin Long in the "Big Scrub." Calvin Long shared with Marjorie the story about his brother Melvin, who had a pet deer. From there the classic story was born.

Leonard Fiddia lived off of Hog Valley Road by the Ocklawaha River.

I recently had the chance to sit down with Leonard Fiddia's grandson Paul Laxton and his wife Sydney who live on the same property that Piety and Leonard lived on when Marjorie visited back in the 1930s to gather material for her books.



Original Fiddia home near the Ocklawaha River

"It's a property that's been in our family since about 1890," said Paul. "The actual house that they lived in is right here where this house is. It's kind of like right here in front of our house."

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***“We are tenants, not possessors,”
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Cross Creek, 1942***

Joy Cotton, Assistant Mgr.
Marjorie K. Rawlings Historic State Park,
Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

Marjorie K. Rawlings wrote about the community that surrounded her; the people, flora and fauna, and the culture living within the communities. As I go about my day, I am reminded of the community of wonderful people that share in the appreciation of Rawlings’ work. Generously, we share while learning from each other and encourage each other to continue to do a good day’s work. The best part of being within this community is that you do not need to be a year-round resident to be an active member. The Rawlings community is full of storytellers, gardeners, wood-stove cooks, and preservers of old Florida. Recently one such member came by Rawlings to make repairs to the old pitcher-pump by the back door of the Rawlings home. Nels Parson, former Park Manager (1987 – 1993) stopped by to lend us a hand in getting the pump operational. He had luck with getting the pump to pull water and offered tips in ways to keep the old pump primed. It was remarkable to see the cool water flow; thank you Nels. After Nels retires for the 2nd time, we’ll sign him up as a volunteer.



Visitation has slowed due to the heat, but the staff has kept busy. Throughout the year, mold can become a nuisance that grows up and down the white historic home. Rick Mulligan has recently finished applying ‘Wet and Forget’ to the exterior of the home, a process that we will do three times a year. Results are slow, but in the long view of historical structural maintenance, it is an ideal approach used at other National Historic Landmarks. Donna Wright recently received a very complimentary letter for one of her tours which included a \$50 donation to our Friends group. A special thank you to Althea Carter, local volunteer, for selling an abundance of books to our visitors. Doug and Jan Krauthem, our Resident Volunteers help with daily chores and tours to give our Rangers an opportunity to focus on projects. Austin Crawford has diligently been weeding and tending the citrus trees and repairing the lattice around the exterior of the Rawlings home. Using donated lumber, Austin built new shelves for getting boxes of screws and misc. tools off the workshop floor. In a short time, Austin has learned the park extensively: giving tours, doing resource maintenance, and tending the new baby chicks. Geoff Gates has again provided visitors with an amazing summer garden. With more than a truck load of manure, a strong back and even stronger tenacity, it grew to a garden that Marjorie would have admired. Cowpeas, eggplant, peppers, corn, okra, zinnias, tithonia, and Seminole pumpkin just to name a few; all a steady standard in gardens of the era 1930’s – 40’s. Judy Baker was monumental with helping put the garden in, and we are all looking forward to her help with the winter garden too! Geoff is working on the Writer’s Talks’ events that will take place during the winter months, and has secured the arrangements for Marjorie’s Birthday Event, August 5th. Please come and share some cake and mango ice cream with old friends and new.



In keeping with tradition, flowers in every room!



Like us on Facebook!

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August and September are set aside each year for the Archival Restoration on the home and contents. Other upcoming projects include replanting of heritage citrus trees in the grove, applying linseed oil to the exterior of the barn, as well as building duplicate gates and fencing by the cattle gap and barn.

We are grateful for the support and generous help from our Friends group. Recently, the Board approved the purchase of two wool-braided rugs to replace those that had become trip hazards. The rugs arrived quickly and look perfect on the front veranda and display room. Also, we have added a Butterfly Garden by the park office, plants purchased from the Dudley Farm Heritage Nursery. The success of the park and its mission is the result of a collaborated effort from the Friends group, volunteers, dedicated staff, and enthusiastic visitors. What a wonderful community to be a part of.



Nels Parson

New braided rugs!
Thank you MKR Friends!



A Fond Farewell

by Rick Mulligan

To all friends of the MKR State Park, please take a moment to thank our great friend Sheila Holloway the next time you see her for her many years of dedicated service at this special place she loves so much.

After 12 years as an OPS employee, and the many other years she worked at the MKR Historic State Park over a lifetime as a resident of the Creek, Sheila Holloway has withdrawn from regular staff status. Sheila assures us she will continue to volunteer occasionally for special events and become active with the Friends of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm.

Everyone who worked with Sheila knows how dedicated she has been and how hard she worked every hour of every day she was at the park. Her special pride was caring for her precious animals, our beautiful chickens and Mallard Ducks. No animals anywhere were cared for so lovingly as our birds at the park. But she was equally as dedicated in maintaining and beautifying Marjorie's house. No detail was ever overlooked. It was loving care.

Her tours were special glimpses into Marjorie's world provided by a genuine Creeker. Our visitors reacted in kind and knew they had made a real connection with the writer and the life she lived.



(Continued from page 1)



James, Piety and Leonard Fiddia

Like many folks in the 1930s, Paul says his grandfather, Leonard Fiddia, did whatever he could to support and feed his family.

“He would night hunt. It was stuff that was illegal, but they were just trying to survive, you know,” said Paul, who is a retired Marion County Sheriff’s deputy. “So he had fish traps, he kept fish traps out there in the river where he would go and collect fish and eat fish. They had venison. They raised hogs and then there was the garden....They lived pretty much off the land. My mom talks about how some of it was illegal, but they were just trying to survive. It may have been somewhat of a simple life, but I think it was a good life for them.”

Paul says Leonard was also a skilled carpenter and electrician. Like many other folks in the “Big Scrub,” he made moonshine. Marjorie not only bought moonshine from Leonard, but helped him make it, spending several weeks with him and his mother Piety Fiddia to gather material for her first major novel, *South Moon Under*.

Sydney Laxton says she loves Marjorie’s novel, *South Moon Under*. “Once I got into it I could not put it down, especially because it was where we live. Our home that we built in 1992, this is where it happened, the *South Moon Under* story took place.”



(l to r) Sydney and Paul Laxton

Leonard, Piety and Marjorie became good friends to the point that when Leonard and his wife Margaret faced a family tragedy, Marjorie or “Marge” as Leonard called her, was even willing to donate her blood to try and save their youngest daughter.



Grace, Carol and Elmer Fiddia

The year was 1949. Leonard and Margaret had three living children. An infant had died shortly after birth. There was Carol, who was 15, seven year old Elmer, and a five year old daughter Grace. In the fall of 1949, Grace became seriously ill and was taken to Dr. J. L. Strange’s medical clinic in McIntosh. She talked about visiting with little Grace in a letter she wrote to her husband Norton Baskin dated December 12th, 1949:

“I went to Dr. Strange’s hospital Monday afternoon, and Leonard and Margaret and Jean were all there, Margaret worn to the bone, Leonard in tears. St. Vincent’s had confirmed the leukemia, and sent the child back where her family could be with her all the time. The great horror of it is her suffering. Aside from an almost constant fever of 105, she has begun to swell, and since the bone-marrow is affected, she is in utter agony....She has to have a blood transfusion almost every day, to keep her alive, and Leonard said he had almost given out of donors.” (Rodger L. Tarr, ed. *The Private Marjorie: the Love Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings to Norton S. Baskin*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004)

Though she was willing to donate, Marjorie’s blood type wasn’t suitable for little Grace. A local hardware store donated a new red wagon for the little girl, something Grace had wanted, but sadly she died one week before Christmas.

Paul and Sydney shared family photos and mementos with me, including a video recorded of Paul’s mother Carol (Leonard’s oldest daughter) talking about Marjorie at a talk in Fort McCoy a few years before Carol passed away. Little Grace’s death remained a difficult subject even decades later.

“She died exactly a week before Christmas,” said Carol Fiddia. “That was a sad Christmas.”



Grace and her mother Margaret Fiddia in Dec., 1949

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Marjorie attended the funeral service at the Fort McCoy Cemetery on December 21, 1949. The memorial book shows that she contributed a vase with white flowers for the service. In a letter to her friend and publisher representative, Norman Berg dated December 29th, 1949, she described sitting at the gravesite in the Fort McCoy Cemetery:

“Leonard’s little girl died a week before Christmas. The funeral services were in the little Fort McCoy cemetery where Leonard’s people back to his great-grandfather are buried, and were simple and sweet, if such a thing is possible, with the wind in the pines, and a nearby saw-mill chug-chugging away. Leonard’s little boy, aged seven, the dreadful Elmer, wrestled with another little boy at the very edge of the grave. Leonard insisted that I sit in the front row with the family, and Elmer sat next to me, chewing gum, and fascinated by his new shoes, which he kept rubbing together with a great squeaking, most satisfactory to Elmer.” (Laura Virginia Monti and Gordon E. Bigelow, eds. *Selected Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*. Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1983)

Marjorie went on in that letter to Norman Berg to describe travelling to the Fiddia homestead to bring Christmas dinner.

“I promised Leonard and Miss Piety that I’d come to the Scrub this week, and I was sure they would have had some of the east coast rain on their deep sand road, so yesterday afternoon I set out with a turkey and all the fixings in time to cook dinner there. They had not a drop of rain, the place is 8 miles from anywhere, and I had to dig out twice. But we had as fine an afternoon and evening as possible under the circumstances of their sadness, and the turkey dinner cooked in the old wood-range was delicious, and Mis’ Piety put her thin old arms around me and said, “This is like old times,”” wrote Marjorie.

Leonard Fiddia’s daughter Carol remembers that Christmas dinner well. “All I remember about that meal is the turkey. Now we had eaten turkey because my dad killed wild turkeys occasionally. But they were always cut up before they were cooked. But she had this great big bought roasted turkey there on the table. Now that was impressive,” said Carol.

“My mom talked about it being a rough Christmas ‘cuz Grace had passed away just prior to Christmas and one thing she talked about was how Marjorie showed up at the house Christmas morning with all the fixings to make ‘em a Christmas dinner meal for them,” said Paul.

“It really touched Carol because she would still choke up you know, telling the story,” said Sydney.

The Fiddias remained close friends throughout Marjorie’s life. Leonard continued to do work to help maintain Marjorie’s home and serviced Marjorie’s Kohler plant which provided her electricity. The family says he even helped with carpentry work on the set of *The Yearling* movie in the mid-1940s. Both Piety Fiddia and Marjorie died in the same year...Piety in April of 1953 and Marjorie in December of 1953. Leonard Fiddia died in 1958.



Murray Laurie Receives Special Recognition

by Secretary of the MKR Farm Board, Kathleen Pagan



(l to r) Kathleen Kauffman, City of GNV Historic Preservation Officer, Murray Laurie and Jay Reeves, Chair City of GNV Historic Preservation Board.

Former Board member of the Friends of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm and active Resource Advisory Member, Murray Laurie was recognized on May 17th at the 2nd Annual City of Gainesville Historic Preservation Awards ceremony, as the recipient of the E.L. Roy Hunt Award. This award is given to exceptional leaders and advocates of historic preservation, and is named for another important MKR Resource Advisory leader, Roy Hunt, who was the first recipient in May 2022.

Murray’s achievements noted of course focused on her successful work documenting the Rawlings home for nomination as a National Historic Landmark, and her presentation in Washington DC to the national review committee. Her long career of accomplishments began when as a graduate student she nominated the UF Historic Buildings for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and she also served as the first editor of the publication of the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation. In addition to work at Dudley Farm State Park, also now a National Historic Landmark, she is also responsible for many other listings on the National Register in Gainesville and Alachua County, including several historic districts in small municipalities and the Historic Haile Homestead, the setting of the film made from Rawlings work “Gal Young’un.” In a telephone conversation afterwards, Murray shared her reaction to receiving this award, saying she was “Thrilled, surprised and really very touched that the City of Gainesville and the Historic Preservation Board reached back in memories of my work lasting 35 years.” Congratulations to Murray!



Farm Life



Its Marjorie's Birthday!

Mark Your Calendar!
Birthday Party for Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings
August 5th, 2023 11a.m. to 1 p.m.
MKRawlings Historic State Park

Volunteer Spotlight

by Park Ranger Geoff Gates

For Peggy Bowie, volunteering at Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings has been a chance to re-wind her life more than 25 years, returning after all that time to a place full of memories.

A long story short: Native Florida girl, born and raised in Mt. Dora. B.A. in International Relations from FSU. A Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling from UF. A stint at the UF Alligator. A stint as a ski bum in Colorado. A full-time therapist working with sex offenders. A second daughter born, and suddenly no time for full time. "I don't know how I heard about it, a half time ranger at Marjorie Rawlings. But it was perfect. And I already loved all her writings."

It was January 1984. The movie version of *Cross Creek* had premiered just a few months before. And the once tranquil home of Marjorie Rawlings was nothing like Peggy had imagined it. "You couldn't see the grass there were so many people!" Buses lined up along the road at 9:00 o'clock waiting for the gate to open, many more pulling in throughout the day. Tours seven days a week, tours every twenty minutes, one tour coming in the front door as the last one went out the back door. "I had lost my voice by the end of every day" she remembers. "Every day."

Presiding over all, bringing order to what might easily have turned into chaos was the always unflappable Sally Morrison. "The best boss I ever had." Peggy says emphatically. "The kind that would never ask you to do something that she wouldn't do herself." And a cast of what Peggy calls "Creek characters." Among them was the local legend Whitey Markle—song writer, singer, cracker scoundrel extraordinaire, and a certain mysterious elderly volunteer, who slipped away to the Yearling for a martini lunch, returning to give the most astonishing tours, full of prancing and shameless flirtation.

It was wonderful in ways but overwhelming too—those never-ending lines of people, always waiting. After about a year, feeling thoroughly burned out, Peggy left. Another long story short: She built a house. Raised those two daughters. Had a twenty-two-year career as a case manager for blind children. Then one day, after so many years, she stopped in at the old Rawlings place. Talked to someone, mentioned kind of on a whim that she might like to come back as a tour guide. Nothing happened. A few months later her oldest daughter Alexis stopped in and told someone the truth—her mother REALLY wanted to be a tour guide again. Things happened.

Peggy returned, with that boundless energy and that drive to know most every little telling detail about Marjorie Rawlings. Every Saturday starting at 11—two, three, maybe even four tours, and no matter how smothering the heat or torrential the rain the tour is fun, loaded with facts and quotes, visitors leave charmed or maybe just a little awestruck. A gold standard. "You know," I'm so much better now than I was then," she tells me. The kids are grown, the house is gone, and I have the time to learn. I understand Marjorie Rawlings so much better than I ever did. And this place is so different too. So peaceful. The way I always wanted it back then."

Peggy will be leaving us in September and October for an extraordinary assignment, made possible by her work here at MKR; she will be the resident volunteer tour guide for the National Park Service on Cumberland Island off the coast of Georgia, perhaps the most pristine seven and a half miles of shoreline in the continental United States. Peggy will be giving tours of Plum Orchard, the magnificent restored mansion of Thomas Carnegie, the dunes, the marshes and the wild horses all around. But come November she will be back in Cross Creek, every Saturday starting at 11, giving the kind of tours she always wanted to give in a place she never forgot.



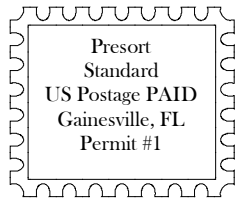
Peggy, circa 1980s

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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!

(updated regularly, please check website www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org)



Saturday, August 5th	11am—1pm	Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Birthday Celebration
Tuesday, August 8th	9pm	WUFT-TV Broadcast of <i>From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida</i>
Saturday, December 2nd	2pm	Annual Meeting of the Friends of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.
Saturday, December 9th	TBA	Annual Holiday Event at The Farm

All events will be held at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park unless otherwise noted

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 Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings 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.

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Comments:

Please Note: Our dues structure was updated September 2021