

# News from the Creek

Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.

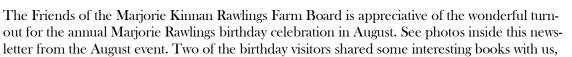
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Visit our website at: www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org

Fall Quarterly 2023

## **President's Message** By Donna Green-Townsend

The fall season is upon us. I know we all look forward to the cooler weather and the many activities the season brings us. In *Cross Creek*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings wrote, *"When the September storms are over we have some of our most superb weather. The oranges take on color, the red-birds are delirious, and in the morning and evening long shadows lie under the citrus trees. The skies are the brightest of robin's-egg blue and the air has a translucent quality, as though the storms had washed it with a fine gold dust."* 



including Connie Christie who traveled from Crawfordville to donate a box of Rawlings related books, including a copy of *The Yearling* signed by Marjorie. Connie made the donation in honor of her late husband, Michael Christie. See more about the donation in this newsletter.



Another birthday guest, Dennis Morgan traveled to Cross Creek from Ocala to share stories from a book about the legendary Piper Brothers from the Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs, FL who provided one of the bears used in *The Yearling* movie filmed in 1945 in the Ocala National Forest. Morgan, who did work for the Piper Brothers in his youth, was recently interviewed by Friends Vice-President Scott Spaulding. We will feature highlights of that interview in our *Winter Edition* of the newsletter in January.



Speaking of Scott Spaulding, mark your calendars to attend our December 2<sup>nd</sup> Friends Annual Meeting and program at the MKR Farm. Scott will be providing a presentation called, "Goodness Snakes Alive." As you may recall, Rawlings dedicated an entire chapter to snakes in *Cross Creek* called "The Ancient Enmity."

Rawlings wrote, "I came to Cross Creek with such a phobia against snakes that a picture of one in the dictionary gave me what Martha calls, "the all-overs." I had the common misconception that in Florida they were omnipresent. I thought, "If anything defeats me, sends me back to urban civilization, it will be the snakes."

Despite her fear of snakes, Rawlings agreed to join famed Florida Herpetologist, Ross Allen on a hunt for rattlesnakes in the upper Everglades. Ross was known for his research at the Reptile Institute at the Silver Springs tourist attraction where he also provided entertainment which included alligator wrestling and rattlesnake milking. During their two-day hunt Rawlings and Allen collected 32 rattlers. The hunt gave Rawlings a new appreciation for snakes and helped her to overcome some of her fears about them. In one amusing story in *Cross Creek* Rawlings describes coming across a small venomous cottonmouth in the guest bathroom of her home. She injured it with a Sears Roebuck catalogue. She then grabbed a copy of her Pulitzer-Prize-winning book, *The Yearling* and finished off the intruder. She writes how the next morning Little Will said of the encounter, "It sho' do come in handy to write books."

Ross Allen died in 1981 after spending nearly half a century at his institute at Silver Springs where he mixed entertainment, education and science garnering acclaim for developing many anti-venom solutions. Recently one of his sons, Robert Ross Allen gave a presentation about his father at the Silver Springs Museum. Following the talk he sat down with me for an interview. A transcript of some of the highlights from our conversation can be found on page 5.

#### MEMBERS OF THE **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Officers 2023

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The Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., would like to encourage people to become more involved in our Citizen Support Organization. If vou would like to volunteer with us or become active on our Board contact us at mkrawlingsfarm@gmail.com.

# A Surprise Donation of MKR Books in Honor of a Rawlings Fan



Connie Christie



In August, Connie Christie and her sister Aileen Posey travelled from Crawfordville, FL to Cross Creek for the MKR Birthday Celebration at the park. She brought with her a donation of books to honor her late husband. Michael A. Christie who was a big fan of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Among the donations was an autographed book of The Yearling by Rawlings. Here is a bit more information about Michael Christie written by Connie and her son Nicholas.

Michael Christie was born July 30, 1938, grew up in Burbank, California, and had a very successful career as an environmental scientist, working for companies such as the State of Oregon, State of Idaho, Westinghouse Corporation at Hanford, WA, and finally retiring from the Savanna River Treatment Site, SC, as their radiation waste manager.

In 1990, Michael was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, which caused him to seek an early retirement. This was not the end of his story thankfully because this allowed for him and his family to move to the small, rural town of Crawfordville, FL (just 20 miles south of Tallahassee). He fell in love with this area back in the 1970s and was so

happy to now call this place home. It was during his time here that he started his collection of books by Mariorie Kinnan Rawlings. He studied her, visited the library at the University of Florida and even toured her farm at Cross Creek. At one time he had over 200 of Rawlings' books in his collection, many first editions and rare prints and eventually sold the bulk of them to a local collector, also from Florida. However, not all was lost as he purposely kept a few of his favorites.

He would be very honored to know that those select few he cherished so fondly are now on display at the Farm Museum that he toured so long ago. He was a very brilliant man and always had a strong vision of what the future entailed. This donation was a long-time dream of his and is a great way to showcase his legacy on the 20th anniversary of his passing.



(left to right) Connie Christie, Board President Donna Green-Townsend and Aileen Posey

If you missed the PBS broadcast of our documentary, "From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida, "you can view it online by going to **PBS.org** and in the <u>search bar</u> or with the search icon type in the word Yearling

BTW...

Like us on Facebook!



## Park Manager's Message By Kevin Patton

First and most important I would like to take the time to thank all the people who support the park; our CSO—The Friends of the Farm, Inc., staff, volunteers, the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, and the many visitors that come to the site each year. I heard someone say recently that Marjorie was like an anthropologist. As I thought about this, I thought how true this is. Marjorie documented a part of Florida's culture that would have been lost to history within a century, as we can see much faster in most areas of the state. Millions of people have moved to Florida since Marjorie so eloquently shared the Florida 'Cracker Culture' with the world. We recently hosted portions of the Statewide Interpreters Meeting at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park and Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Both sites have a rich history in the Florida Cracker Culture. My staff and I interpreted this history to nearly all the Interpretive Chair Heads for the Florida Park Service. What an opportunity to share this history and culture with a group so passionate about Florida's natural and cultural resources.



The torch that Marjorie lit is now our responsibility to keep burning. I grew up in the culture that Marjorie so loved and documented. I can see the accent, words and every part of that culture changing. My own children do not use the same words or phrases as I do. Although they still retain that North Florida accent, you can hear the many influences from other places. Several years ago, while meeting with the director of the Florida Park Service and several others in our Upper Management Team, we were all looking at one of the pristine lakes at Gold Head Branch State Park. I mentioned something about the "minners" swimming down the edge of the lake. They all started laughing and asked what exactly was a "minner?" I explained the Gambusia or mosquitofish that y'all call a minnow is what I am talking about. I then stated I am from here. There used to be a sign on one of the bait shops in Gainesville that said "minners" for sale. How fast things change.

There are many local names for plants, fish, and animals that my family and families from this area used that when you use them now most people do not know what you are talking about. I would like to share some of these with you. We will start with a few of the fish. A bass was called Green Trout. Chain Pickerel-Jack Fish, Spotted Sunfish-Stumpknocker, Redfin Pickerel-Redfin Pike, Flyer-Guinea Bream, Long Eared Sunfish-Red Belly, Bowfin-Mudfish, and Brown Bullhead-Buttercat. The first time I heard someone mention a Crappie I said, "We don't have fish called that here." I then realized they were referring to a Specked Perch.

My Granny and her family called a Skink Lizard, Blue Scorpion. A Scorpion, the actual arachnid, they called a Centipede. Southeastern Pocket Gopher, the rodent, they called a Salamander. If you mentioned a Gopher to them it was a Tortoise that lives in a hole not a burrow. An Amphiuma, a large Salamander, they called a Lampus Eel. A Pied-billed Grebe was known as a Didapper. A hatchling Chicken is a biddy. An American Ibis was a Curlew. Curlews were eaten for supper sometimes. Curlew fit in the general category of pond birds.

I could continue to write page after page on this. My point is, if we do not continue with Marjorie's legacy this will all be gone. Marjorie, being an outsider, noticed things about us Crackers that we would have never considered significant. We would have most likely never documented this about ourselves. She set the example for us to follow. We must not allow her story or ours to die. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park in my opinion is a world heritage site. She wrote about the human story. Although we are all the same we are at the same time very different. Marjorie showcased the uniqueness of the Old Florida Culture. This uniqueness exists in all cultures and is what makes us different. If we were all the same, it would be an awfully boring world. When people hear me talk sometimes, they laugh. I am not insulted by this. I am very proud of who and where I come from. I wear this royal crown of old Florida with pride. Your support helps keep this story alive, again thank you so much for all you do.

"I do not profess to know all there is to know about frogs, lizards, ants and varmints. I have learned enough, however, in years of enforced intimacy, to turn them from aliens into friends, or at least into bowing acquaintances." Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Cross Creek, Chapter 14, Toady frogs, lizards, antses, and varmints.

# **Donation to MKR Farm Sparks Memories**

Friends of the MKR Farm life member Mary Bridgman reminisced about items she donated to the MKR farm in her essay, "Marjorie and Me," published in the 2023 edition of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature (pp.79-82). Bridgman spent her early years in Hawthorne, "growing up in Marjorie's shadow."

Recently, to Bridgman's surprise, her story became intertwined with Rawlings', as a result of a request she saw in this newsletter for "a large half gallon or gallon size jar with lid" to preserve eggs laid by hens at the MKR Historic State Park. The jar was needed for making "glass eggs"—preserving fresh eggs, using lime, without refrigeration, until they are needed. The method doesn't pickle the eggs but keeps them fresh so that they can be used just as if they had been gathered from the chicken coop or farmhouse yard. Bridgman had "such a jar gathering dust" in her pantry and knew exactly what she wanted to do with it.

The jar, a set of wooden oars, a metal bait bucket, three iron skillets, a collection of enamel dishpans, and a metal colander have now found a home at the MKR Farm. Bridgman says she is delighted that these items, "... soaked with memories known to few, have become part of a worthy effort to preserve and interpret the story of one of my heroes, as well the life she chose to live, part of the community and place that inspired her, the place that became her home."



Asst. Park Manager Joy Cotton (1) with Mary Bridgman



Entertainment from the Front Porch Backsteppers



Guests were treated to cupcakes and mango ice cream



We had a great turn-out!



(Lto R) Volunteer Ginger Carter, Asst. Park Manager Joy Cotton, Board Treasurer Anne Pierce and Board VP Scott Spaulding

Pictures from Marjorie's Birthday Party in August

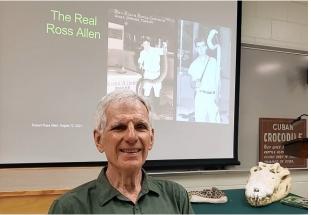


Board VP Scott Spaulding and Park Mgr. Kevin Patton



Raffle winner for Orange Marmalade, Sharon Blasiole

# Robert Allen on the Legacy of His Famous Father, Herpetologist Ross Allen



Robert Ross Allen

Donna: You don't live in Florida right?

Robert: That's right. I live in North Carolina now near Pinehurst, west of there a little bit, called West End. It was the end of the railroad when it got that name.

Donna: How long did you live in Florida before you moved out of the state?

Robert: I left Florida in my 20s, uh mid 20s when I left to go to the seminary. And so that's what took me away."

Donna: So, are you his oldest son?

Robert: Yes. I'm 85.

Donna: How many siblings do you have?

Robert: I had four initially. And in a later marriage dad added three more, boys.

Donna: People are going to obviously want to know why aren't you a snake and alligator guy like him?

Robert: Well, it's dad's fault. I mean he taught me early how to handle snakes and enjoy the outdoors as well as alligators and other animals. And when I worked for him for several years as a guide who was doing the show, handling the snakes and alligators and did the alligator wrestling and that, it was fun. And so I did that. I had some close calls in the process, but no contacts. (laugh)

Donna: No snake bites for you?

Robert: No. Non-poisonous snakes, but not a poisonous snake.



Ross Allen and family members



Ross Allen with alligator



Donna: I just finished a documentary that I worked on gathering stories from people who were either doubles for Gregory Peck and Claude Jarman, Jr. or worked on the set of the MGM movie, *The Yearling.* Gregory Peck's family sent us home movie clips from the time of the filming back in 1945. In the clips there were scenes of Ross Allen with his snakes. In the interviews that I've done I have had differing stories about the snake bite scene in the movie. One person who worked on the movie set said that it wasn't Gregory Peck who got snake bit, but that they paid Ross Allen \$500 to stick his hand down there and he didn't get hurt because he took the rattlesnake's fangs out. Claude Jarman disagrees saying they had a Plexiglas screen and so the snake couldn't get 'em. So what do you know as the real story?

Robert: Well dad affirmed for me as he told the story, not the Plexiglas, he didn't tell me about that, but he said the snake did not actually bite him. And you can almost tell in the filming. They did it more than once, but in the filming his hand is moving fairly fast. And I don't know whether that was to attract the snake's attention or just try to give them footage that they could edit and make it look like he actually made contact. So it looked close (laugh) when you see the film, but it does go by real fast.

Donna: But did he pull the rattlesnake's fangs out. Would he ever have done that? Robert: No I don't think so. No he didn't . I don't think he did that. Well, with the Plexiglas they didn't need to. Now the snake might have, either way, whether the fangs were there or not, he could have left some venom on the Plexiglas but you know I'm not aware of that at all. He never told me about that part.

Donna: I always wondered if he milked the snake first.

Robert: Yes he did that. (laugh). Yeah, he did that. Now I assume that was shortly before they did the filming. He's done that before uh, if you're going to work with a poisonous snake you want to reduce the severity of the bite if it were to occur.

Ross Allen at milking demonstration



Ross Allen milking a rattlesnake



A snake-bit hand



Ross Allen catching an alligator under water at Silver Springs

#### (Continued from page 5)

Donna: Now you showed a picture from 1944 in your presentation where he was bitten by an Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake.

Robert: Right.

Donna: And so I thought well it was only a year later they were filming *The Yearling* movie, so his hand must have recuperated

Robert: It did pretty well. The thumb was stiff so he couldn't use it and he was very clever to hide it. So there are very few pictures that show his left hand or at least his left thumb. He'd have it in his pocket or he'd have it other ways, under something. He did use it occasionally to pick up a rattlesnake but it wasn't as secure as using then his right hand. So you can tell when those pictures were taken by which hand he was using, almost all the time. Not quite.

Donna: Clarence Brown directed the *The Yearling* in 1945. Actor Claude Jarman, Jr., who played young Jody Baxter in the movie, said they would sometimes do like 80 takes of a scene. Robert: Right

Donna: And Jarman says Director Brown would say, "That was great, print it, but let's do another one for Paris."

Robert: (laugh) Always. Always. I wasn't in the movies but I watched a number of them being made and that was a constant thing. In one occasion in the *Okeefenokee* (movie), the director said 'oh that was perfect, let's do it again.' Really. (laugh) ....well when he (Ross Allen) did it again the snake bit him on the knee. I don't know whether he counts that as a snake bite, but it was rated as a zero. In other words he got no venom. They rate it 1 to 5, so the one on his thumb was a 5.

Donna: What was the main point that started him on this trek of working with gators and snakes?

Robert: Well, dad, it's hard to name a particular thing, but as a child, fairly young, he enjoyed the outdoors more than anything else and so he was always outdoors. And he was fascinated by all kinds of animals so he would collect whatever, grass-hoppers, tadpoles, you know, anything. And his dad went with him on occasions and (he'd) say 'here's a good place to look.' So he had that encouragement from his dad. And his mother was the one who said yes or no to whether he could keep those creatures in the house. They were pretty tolerant of that. So in a way that was a start. But when he moved to Florida he got so excited about many things and so he caught his first rattlesnake and his first alligator very quickly after they moved to Florida. Now he was experimenting with how to do that. And he never told me the specifics of the story, but obviously those have to be done very carefully and I'm not sure how he learned other than by experience. But during that time he was not bitten. I mean those early (years), either alligator or snake.

Donna: People are always curious. How did the connection between Marjorie and Ross take place. Do you know that? Robert: I don't know exactly, but it probably was having to do with managing the animals, particularly the snake.

Donna: But he took her in the Everglades didn't he on a rattlesnake hunt? Robert: Yeah, yeah, that's right. They had some connection and I don't know exactly what it was but mother also went with dad or on her own and knew Marjorie and may have even contributed to her cookbook. I'm not sure mother did, but she could have.

Donna: What do you most want people to remember about your dad? Robert: I think I want them to remember his care for the environment. He wouldn't have called it the environment; he just used the word nature. So he did nature hikes and nature studies and it was pretty much the same thing. The interest and focus has changed over the years, but he would be considered an environmentalist today. Then he was called a naturalist. But he had great compassion for the care of not only animals but people and the environment.



From L to R Karen Allen, Robert Ross Allen, Martha Lynne Allen, Betty Allen (Landers Bashaw)

Editor's note: Robert Ross Allen is currently working on a book about his dad.

# Writers Talks Return!



On Saturday, November 4th, the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park will host a Writer's Talk with John Hemingway, author of A Strange Tribe: A Family Memoir. The book is an intimate chronicle of the tumultuous relationship between father Gregory Hemingway and grandfather Ernest.

There will be a book signing at 1:30pm and a



presentation with questions and answers at 2:00pm



On Saturday, January 13th, the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park will host a Writer's Talk with Marisella Veiga, author of *Famous* Florida Recipes: Centuries of Good Eating in the Sunshine State. The book is a modern revision of Lowis Carlton's beloved classic. Marisella Veiga, an award winning journalist and short story writer, is also the author of We Carry our Homes with Us: A Cuban-American Memoir.

There will be a book signing and food sampling at 1:30pm. The presentation with questions and answers will begin at 2:00pm.

# Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., Annual Meeting



The Annual Meeting of the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., will be held Saturday, December 2, at 2:00pm, at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park.

"Goodness Snakes Alive" will be presented by Friends of the MKR Farm Board Vice-President Scott Spaulding.

Free program with a small entrance fee at the park entry.

# An Invasion of Park Rangers

Approximately 145 park rangers, specialists and personnel from the Florida Park Service toured the MKR Farm as part of a State Interpretive Workshop on September 27th. The visit to the MKR Historic State park included tours of MKR's home, video showings of our documentary, "From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida," and refreshments including gingerbread made from MKR's Cross Creek Cookery. Among the participants was the Director of the Division of Recreation and Parks for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Chuck Hatcher. The two-day Interpretive Workshop also included Tours of Silver Springs State Park and Payne's Prairie Preserve State Park.







# LIFETIME MEMBERS

Ginny and Gunter Arndt Judy Baker Kate Barnes Sheila Barnes Catherine Beazley Diane E. Beck Roger and Linda Blackburn Robert Blauer Sybil Ann Brennan Mary W. Bridgman Arden Brugger Dan Cantliffe Ginger and Kevin Carter Norma Davis Patricia Ann Davis Sheila Dickison Barbara E. DuPont John and Balinda Ferree Sue Gaintner Ordy Greenly Ronald Haase Robert E. Haines J. C. Harrell Judith Harris Candace Henderson Mrs. Nathan V. Hendricks, III Sheila Holloway John and Phyllis Holmgren Roy Hunt Claude and Katie Jarman Deanne Clark & William H. Jeter, Jr. Ashley Jordan Brenda Keith Mary J. Kelly Shirley Kiser Richard Knellinger, P.A. Angel Kwolek-Folland Murray Laurie Shirley Lucas Michaelyn Luttge Colleen, Frank and Lana Mahoney Janet Matthews Ruth Maughan Judith McFadden Mary Lisa McGaughran Robert D. McReynolds Eleanor Merritt Elinor N. Midgette W.L. Miller James R. Nici Rebecca Nullier Spence Perry Marsha Dean Phelts Margaret Anne Pierce Liz Pooley A.L. Rhinehart Art & Edda Ross Tom and Luisa Sheer Martha Steward Angela Territo Shirley Thompson M. List Underwood, Jr. Pamela Lydick Whiting Colleen Whitlock Barbara Wingo

#### CORPORATE MEMBERS

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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, November 4th	1:30pm	Writer's Talk–John Hemingway, author of <i>A Strange Tribe</i> Book signing at 1:30pm, Presentation at 2pm					
Saturday, December 2nd	2pm	Annual Meeting of the Friends of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc. Presentation, "Goodness Snakes Alive" by VP Scott Spaulding (see pg 7)					
Saturday, December 9th	5pm-7:30pm	Annual Holiday Event at The Farm					
Saturday, January 13th	1:30pm	Writer's Talk–Marisella Veiga, author of <i>Famous Florida Recipes:</i> <i>Centuries of Good Eating in the Sunshine State</i> Book signing at 1:30pm, Presentation at 2pm					

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						Membership in the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.
Туре	1yr	3yr	5yr	10yr	Lifetime	<ul> <li>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.</li> <li>Name</li> </ul>
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	Address
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				Farm, In 0337 <i>manrawli</i>	our check to: c. ngs.org	City/State/Zip         Phone         Email         Comments:

\*\*Please Note: Our dues structure was updated September 2021 \*\*