

Famous Floridians: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

Marjorie began writing at the early age of six. When she was only eleven, she received a \$2 prize for a story published in the *Washington Post*. She went on to become a journalist in the 1920s and, as such, she was something of a trailblazer.

Rawlings came to Florida to visit in 1926 and fell in love with the land. Two years later, she returned to buy 72 acres at Cross Creek, near Gainesville, dividing her time between growing oranges and writing fiction.

The surrounding landscape at Cross Creek gave her the setting for her stories. In 1930, Marjorie sold a short story entitled "*Cracker Chidlings*" to a magazine. The chief editor inquired, "Have you ever thought about writing a novel?" Her response was that she was "...vibrating with material like a hive of bees in swarm."

Her first novel, *South Moon Under*, was published in 1933. The book captures the richness of north central Florida life at Cross Creek. Marjorie's writing style was as backwoodsy as the scrub country she described.

In 1938, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *The Yearling*, her best-known work about a young boy named Jody who lives in rural Florida, and adopts an orphaned fawn as a pet. As both the boy and the fawn grow, Jody struggles with the practical hardships of life on a farm, family relationships and expectations, and his responsibilities as he



Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings at work.

approaches adulthood. This story was based on actual events. However, in real life it was a girl who adopted the fawn.

Several of her books have been made into movies including *The Yearling* and a semiautobiographical work entitled *Cross Creek*. In this book, she describes how she first arrived in Florida and came to love its rural way of life, despite the hardships it entailed. Rawlings, who loved food, entertaining, and growing vegetables and herbs, followed Cross Creek with the publication of *Cross Creek Cookery*.



Marjorie Rawlings' front porch was her office.

Today, her home at Cross Creek has become the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park. When visitors come, they experience the whole sense of what life was like when she lived here. You can see the pasture that Dora, the Jersey cow, once called home. The citrus grove, farmyard, and garden have all been restored. The reconstructed barn represents Rawlings' creative farming efforts. The original pump house remains. The main farmhouse, put together from three separate buildings interconnected with porches, is there. On a porch is where she wrote most of her classics sitting at the cypress table

on a deerhide chair with her typewriter in front of her. She often slept on the daybed, a few paces from the typewriter.

Her friend and attorney, Philip May, wrote to her: "Ponce de Leon discovered Florida in 1513, but he had found only the physical and material Florida. Then, more than 400 years later, you came to discover the heart and spirit of Florida and revealed them to the world in writings of rare beauty and sensitiveness."