

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS HOUSE AND FARM YARD

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings House and Farm Yard

Other Name/Site Number: Los Hermanos, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 18700 South County Road 325

City/Town: Cross Creek

Not for publication: _____

State: Florida

County: Alachua

Code: 001

Zip: 32640

Vicinity: X

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: _____

Public-Local: _____

Public-State: X

Public-Federal: _____

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: _____

Site: _____

Structure: _____

Object: _____

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2

2

Noncontributing

3 buildings

2 sites

4 structures

_____ objects

9 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Number of Related Multiple Property Listing: 0

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements put forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency of Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic

Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: Recreation and Culture

Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: (OTHER) Frame Vernacular, Cracker Farmhouse

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Cement

Walls: Wood; Weatherboard, Board and Batten

Roof: Wood; Shake Shingles

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings House is an L-shaped, wood frame residence located at 18700 South County Road 325 near the unincorporated community of Cross Creek, Florida. It occupies a rural site in southwest Alachua County about one-half mile south of Cross Creek, which derives its name from the narrow waterway that flows between Orange Lake and Lake Lochloosa. The oldest part of the house was built in the 1880s, with several later additions. A small wood frame pump house is also a contributing building. The site consists of approximately three acres that comprise the house, grounds, and the adjacent citrus grove.

Setting

The well-preserved, one-story house, which faces east, is set back approximately forty-five feet from the front gate on a paved, two-lane country road. The topography of the site is level. The residence is now part of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, and is located on the north edge of the seventy-four-acre farmstead that Marjorie Rawlings and her first husband, Charles Rawlings, purchased in 1928.¹ In addition to the house, the only other structure on the property that dates back to the historic period is the small wood frame pump house, located approximately thirty-five feet to the south of the back door. The lawn and ornamental shrubs surrounding the house set it apart from the adjacent small grove of about one hundred citrus trees, which is managed as an agricultural resource, although some citrus trees are planted in the yard, as is customary for the use of the household. A fenced vegetable and flower garden and chicken and duck pens are located in the rear of the house. Two small chicken pens are located just east of the barn, at the edge of the grove.

Noncontributing structures on the site consist of the barn, tenant house, pens, and an outhouse. A wire fence, somewhat overgrown with vines, surrounds most of the house and grove, enclosing the approximately three acres that comprise this site. The entire Rawlings property extends west to Orange Lake and east across County Road 325, first paved in 1939.

General Characteristics of the Rawlings House

Exterior

The farmhouse that Rawlings came to love, despite its dinginess, “sat snugly then as now under the tall old orange trees, and had a simple grace of line, low rambling, and one-storied.”² It is typical of late nineteenth-century frame vernacular homes built in the southeastern states, raised approximately two feet off the ground on concrete piers and sheathed in a combination of vertical board and batten siding and horizontal lapped siding. The gable roof is covered with wood shakes on a 12-to-12 slope over the main rooms and from 3-to-12 to 6-to-12 over the porches and shed rooms. The dwelling has a variety of window sizes, averaging about five feet in height and two feet from the floor, providing ample cross ventilation. Most of the windows, which are placed on each exterior wall of each room, are double-hung sash windows. There are three brick chimneys, one located on the south gable end of the house, another placed at the center of the north wing gable roof, and the third at the center of the dining room/kitchen wing roofline.

The unadorned house is composed of three units connected by wide porches that indicate the pattern of the several additions to the original form. The main body of the house was built in the 1880s as a two-room cabin with a dogtrot (an open hallway extending through the house from porch to porch). Two small bedrooms were

¹ Letter from Wray Rawlings to his brother Charles concerning the property transaction of July 17, 1928, which resulted in the purchase of the present Rawlings home. Copy of the letter is in the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Collection at the Smathers Library, University of Florida, Gainesville.

² Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Cross Creek* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1942), 17.

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built on the west side of the original house in the 1890s. Around 1920 the dining room and kitchen wing was added to the west, and a two-bedroom wing was added to the north end of the house around 1925, attached to one of the small bedrooms with an open porch. These last two additions, recycled from nearby farmsteads, were moved to the site and attached to the main house by porches and extensions from the original roof.

The front (east) façade of house, the longer part of the L-shaped structure, is divided into two sections. The main entrance is at the center of the screened porch that extends across the oldest part of the structure, the south section with the highest roof. The north wing of the building has an open porch with five squared and chamfered posts supporting the roof. The rear (west) façade also reveals an open, covered porch with five wood posts extending along the north wing of the house. This porch leads to the kitchen/dining room wing, which is linked to the main house with a screened porch. The south façade of the house also features a screened porch with a single door and four wood steps leading to the side yard and the citrus grove.

Interior

A single screen door is the main entrance to the house, opening to the front screened porch. The porch (10 feet x 30 feet) is furnished much as it was when Marjorie Rawlings lived in the house, her typewriter on the round table with the sabal palm tree trunk as its support where she did much of her writing. A pair of glazed French doors is placed on either side of the pair of centered glazed doors that lead into the living room, which has vertical board and batten paneling painted white. The wall that once separated the two sections of the original 1880s cabin that formed this area was removed, creating a spacious living room (15 feet x 30 feet) with a ten-foot ceiling. The fireplace on the south wall of the room has a simple wood mantel with no embellishments. To the left of the fireplace is a closet, which Rawlings modified by cutting the door in half so that firewood could be stored at the bottom and, by adding shelving, the upper half could serve as her liquor cabinet.

One doorway on the west wall of this room opens to a passage to the dining room and kitchen wing, and an adjacent door leads to one of the two small bedrooms (9.5 feet x 12.5 feet) added in 1890, now used to display books and photos of Marjorie Rawlings. The small room to the south is used as an office for the Historic State Park staff. One of the bathrooms added by Rawlings serves as a passage from the display room to the north wing of the house. The original fixtures are still in place. This bathroom leads to a bedroom (14 feet x 15 feet) used by Rawlings as a guest room. The adjacent room, which is of identical size and, which like the guest room has a fireplace and a closet, was Mrs. Rawlings's bedroom. She made an addition of a second bathroom to her bedroom.

The dining room, in the west wing, is the only room in the house with a varnished floor, revealing the rich patina of the heart pine used in the construction of the house. All of the other rooms have painted floors except the porch and kitchen floors, which are unpainted. The dining room (13.5 feet x 13.5 feet) has a fireplace with a simple wooden surround and mantel. To the right is a built-in cabinet where dishes and glassware used by Rawlings are displayed. The kitchen is next to the dining room, and the flue of the wood cook stove shares the chimney with the dining room fireplace. There are built-in cabinets and an enamel sink in the kitchen area, which is of the same dimensions as the dining room. A small pantry is adjacent to the kitchen, and a storage room is attached to the rear of this wing of the house.

Next to the kitchen is the south-facing screen porch. A wooden icebox and a built-in wood storage box (12 feet x 1.8 feet) along the north wall comprise the furnishings of this area. A screen door leads to the side yard.

Alterations

Marjorie Rawlings made some significant alterations to the house after she and Charles Rawlings moved to

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Cross Creek in 1928. In 1933 the east (front) porch was widened, the porch roof extended with solid walls with lapped siding built up to a level of four feet, and the area above this screened on three sides. She replaced two windows between the living room and front porch with French doors and painted the house inside and out, covering the worn gray paint with white paint, but keeping the dark green trim. A remnant of the original paint can be seen inside the wood storage boxes that Charles Rawlings built on the back porch. The lower section of the wall that forms the back of the interior of the box has never been repainted. The white with green trim paint color scheme is maintained as appropriate to the period when Mrs. Rawlings occupied the house. In 1933 she added a carport to the house south of the front screen porch, and replaced the rusted metal roofing with hand-cut cypress shingles.

There was no electricity when the Rawlings moved in 1928. Mrs. Rawlings purchased a Delco generator (installed in the pump house) in 1938 and had the house wired at that time. There were no indoor bathrooms in 1928 but she added two bathrooms, one in 1930 (as described in *Cross Creek*) and a second one at the north end of the bedroom wing a few years later. The Rawlings removed the dividing wall in the living room, added the bookshelves and modified the door in the closet next to the fireplace, as noted above.

Pump House

The pump house, a wood frame structure measuring approximately 7 feet by 11 feet, was built during the tenancy of Marjorie Rawlings. It stands about 35 feet southwest of the back steps. The exterior of the building is covered with a mixture of shiplap siding and bead board siding. The gable roof is covered with metal roofing and the flooring is roughly finished concrete. A wood panel door is placed on the east façade of the utility building, which is used to store small tools.

Noncontributing Features, Buildings and Structures

Behind the house to the west, are a fenced vegetable and flower garden, and two wood and wire pens, one for ducks and one for chickens; two additional chicken pens are just west of the barn, which is a noncontributing building constructed in 1991 to replace the original barn demolished in 1969.³ Situated in the grove southwest of the house is a small, unpainted tenant house. This building was moved from an adjacent property in 2002, repaired and a front porch added to serve as an interpretive feature as the original tenant house was demolished around 1969. The outhouse, located northwest of the house and similar to the one described in *Cross Creek*, was moved to the property after it became a state historic site.⁴ The original citrus trees were killed by a series of severe freezes in the years following Mrs. Rawlings's death. The citrus grove on the property at present was planted in the 1970s and represents, for interpretive purposes, a small portion of the commercial grove managed by Mrs. Rawlings between 1928 and 1953. Much of the original grove land was not replanted and has reverted to dense hammock (forest).

The Rawlings House Since 1953

At the time of her death in 1953, Marjorie Rawlings left her house and 125 acres of surrounding property to the Florida Endowment Corporation (now the University of Florida Foundation, Inc.).⁵ It comprises a microcosm of Florida farmland, marshland and succeeding hammock and represents the history, culture and architecture typical of a rural Florida that has all but vanished. The historic site has been managed by the Florida

³ Katie Yost, Robert Wilson and Jeff Johnson, "Reconstruction of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Barn, Cross Creek, Florida: Phase I," report prepared for the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Recreation and Parks, March 18, 1981.

⁴ Rudd McClellan Long, "A Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings State Historic Site" (Master's research project, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1990).

⁵ Yost et al., "Reconstruction of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Barn," 2.

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Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Recreation and Parks since 1970. Approximately eight acres comprise the main interpretive area of house, yard, and grove, with several short walking paths through the hammock. The remaining acreage of the original homestead is managed by joint agreement with the Alachua County Parks Department, the Florida Division of Recreation and Parks, and the University of Florida Foundation. Since 1970, the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park has been open to the public seven days a week, now drawing approximately 20,000 visitors annually. Guest book records indicate visitors come from most states in the nation and some from other countries.⁶ Due to the dramatic increase of visitors after the release of the movie *Cross Creek* in 1983, the house was closed to the public for a year in 1995-96 while the foundation was strengthened and repairs to the wood fabric of the house undertaken, including replacement of the wood shakes on the roof. The house and its surrounding cultural landscape are maintained as nearly as possible as they were during the tenancy of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings from 1928 until 1953.

In 1965, architecture students at the University of Florida, under the guidance of Professor F. Blair Reeves, completed a study of the house and made measured drawings. The documentation is housed in the collections of the Architecture and Fine Arts Library at the University of Florida.⁷ In 1970, the house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁸

Integrity

The house that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings purchased with her first husband, Charles Rawlings, in 1928 retains an exceptionally high degree of integrity for its entire historic period. The few changes to the original structure were carried out by Rawlings and therefore reflect her residency. Overall, the interior and exterior retain their original appearance. Many of the furnishings and art works that can be seen in the house today belonged to Rawlings, and their placement and arrangement are, for the most part, determined by historical photographs and the recollections of her second husband, Norton Baskin.

⁶ Guest Book entries include names, addresses and comments. Copies are on file at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park.

⁷ Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings House Drawings, Architecture and Fine Arts Library at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

⁸ National Register of Historic Places nomination was prepared by John McDermott. The property was officially listed in the National Register on September 29, 1970.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: _ Locally: _

Applicable National Register Criteria: A_ B_X C_ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A_ B_ C_ D_ E_ F_ G

NHL Criteria: 2

NHL Theme(s): III. EXPRESSING CULTURAL VALUES
3. Literature

Period(s) of Significance: 1928-1953

Significant Dates: 1933, 1935, 1938, 1942, 1953 (publication dates of major works)

Significant Person: Rawlings, Marjorie Kinnan

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Historic Contexts: XIX: LITERATURE
B. Fiction
1. Novel
2. Short Story

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State Significance of Property and Justify Criteria, Criteria Consideration, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings House and Farm Yard is nationally significant under Criterion 2 in the area of literature as the home of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, a leading twentieth-century American writer whose works continue to interest scholars, students, and the general reading public. Rawlings lived in the house from 1928 until her death in 1953. It was here that she wrote all of her major works, including the short stories that first brought her critical acclaim and the Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, *The Yearling*. The property includes the frame house, outbuildings, and citrus grove she described in her lyrical memoir, *Cross Creek*. The property is nationally significant as the property most closely associated with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's literary career.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Life and Literary Significance

When Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and her first husband, Charles Rawlings, moved from Rochester, New York, to the small community of Cross Creek, Florida, in 1928, she discovered the subjects and the environment that would become the basis for her most enduring literary works. The short stories she submitted to *Scribner's Magazine* in the late 1920s and early 1930s attracted the attention of Maxwell Evarts Perkins, an editor at Charles Scribner's Sons, who encouraged and mentored her for several decades. Her first novel, *South Moon Under* (1933), received a warm reception in the United States and in England, and her best known work, *The Yearling*, became a national best seller when it appeared in 1938. It earned her the 1939 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and secured her place in American literature.

Marjorie Kinnan was born in Washington, D.C., on August 8, 1896, the daughter of Arthur Kinnan and Ida Traphagen Kinnan. Arthur Kinnan was a lawyer and examiner with the U.S. Patent Office, but his passion was the dairy farm he kept on the outskirts of the city. He shared his appreciation of and love for the land and its creatures with his daughter, and Marjorie responded intensely to nature with all of her senses from an early age. Her empathy for rural life was reinforced by summertime visits to her maternal grandparents' Michigan farm. Marjorie would draw on these memories in her last novel, *The Sojourner*, which is set on a northern farm. The Kinnans encouraged Marjorie's precocious writing efforts; she contributed verses and stories to the Sunday children's page in the *Washington Post*, writing contests sponsored by *McCall's* magazine, and her school magazine. After graduation from Western High School in Washington, D.C., in 1914, she enrolled in the University of Wisconsin, where she majored in English and was on the staff of the literary magazine and school yearbook. She earned praise for her creative writing and won scholarly honors such as election to Phi Beta Kappa. She also met her first husband, Charles Rawlings, who, like Marjorie, majored in English and wrote for the university's literary magazine.⁹

After graduation in 1918, Marjorie found a job in New York City as a writer and editor at the national headquarters of the Y.W.C.A. She also tried, unsuccessfully, to sell her short stories and poetry. Despite her dreams of adventurous travel abroad, after she and Charles Rawlings married in 1919, the couple found jobs as reporters for the *Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Kentucky. Several years later they moved to Rochester, New York where Marjorie continued to write feature articles for local newspapers. In addition to her journalistic efforts, she wrote a series of verses, "Songs of the Housewife," which were syndicated and ran in fifty newspapers.¹⁰ Despite the success of the verses, Marjorie and Charles both felt their writing careers had stagnated. In March 1928, they took a vacation to Florida, where they visited Jimmy and Wray Rawlings,

⁹ Elizabeth Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Sojourner at Cross Creek* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1988), 13, 22, 28, and 31.

¹⁰ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 36, 46, 49, 53.

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Charles's brothers, who were living in a small village in the citrus-growing interior of the state. The remote and half-wild area, with its natural beauty and promise of the simple life, inspired Marjorie to declare to her husband, "Let's sell everything and move South! How we could write."¹¹

The seventy-four acre Armstrong place in Cross Creek had its drawbacks, but it also had more than three thousand mature orange trees, a house and several outbuildings, and was available at an affordable price. Marjorie and Charles purchased the property and moved to Florida in November of 1928. They called the house "Los Hermanos" (The Brothers), for the two Rawlings brothers joined them in the adventure of learning to manage a citrus grove and fixing up the dilapidated place.¹²

From the time of their arrival in Cross Creek, Marjorie fell under the spell of the natural beauty of the place. She renewed her commitment to her writing and took voluminous notes on the country and the people, filling her journals with detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna and the delights and the torments of her primitive, rural lifestyle. In 1930, scarcely a year after moving to Florida, she sent a group of sketches called "Cracker Chidlings" to *Scribner's Magazine*. Acceptance of this piece encouraged her to develop other short stories that blend real and imaginary characters. Her story "Jacob's Ladder" brought her to the attention of Scribner's chief editor, Maxwell Perkins, who recognized her talent and potential. With his suggested revisions, the story appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* and earned her a \$700 check, which she used to install an indoor bathroom in the farmhouse.¹³ Although some Florida reviewers with an eye toward the state's tourist industry criticized her "warts and all" depictions of the Cracker folk, others praised her mastery of the country dialect and her limpid prose. Perkins encouraged Marjorie to write a full-length novel, and she replied that she was "vibrating with material like a hive of bees in swarm."¹⁴

Moving to Florida transformed Marjorie Rawlings's literary imagination. Her enthusiasm for its natural beauty and people gave her writing new depth, texture, and maturity. She began to move out of the "local color" vein into the tradition associated with such writers as Mark Twain, Kate Chopin, Alice Walker, and Flannery O'Connor, who "closely align[ed] their characters to a particular place and its history . . . the characters are not primarily described from the viewpoint of an external observer: instead, their motivations and interior vision are integral to their work."¹⁵

To gather material for her first novel, *South Moon Under*, Rawlings boarded for two and a half months with a family that lived in the Big Scrub, an area that is today part of the Ocala National Forest. Immersing herself in the lives of the Fiddia family, she helped with household chores, hunted (illegally) for food for the table, and lent a hand in making moonshine (also illegal). Like Thomas Hardy, Rawlings made the place itself a character in her novel, and those familiar with the Scrub found no fault in her depictions of the wilderness and the Oklawaha River. Her descriptions of river trips and life along its banks are as richly detailed as Mark Twain's Mississippi River imagery.¹⁶ When published in 1933, *South Moon Under* was chosen as a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection and received favorable reviews. The novel's appearance, however, coincided with a severe personal crisis for its author. Rawlings's floundering marriage came to an end and Charles left Cross

¹¹ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹⁴ Rodger L. Tarr, ed., *Max & Marjorie: The Correspondence between Maxwell E. Perkins and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 1999), 37.

¹⁵ Susan Balee, "Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, 1896-1953," in *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, Jay Parini, ed. (New York: Charles Scribners, 2002), 219-220.

¹⁶ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 76-77.

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Creek.¹⁷ Determined to remain in Florida, Marjorie Rawlings fought depression and anxiety by taking off with her friend, Dessie Smith Vinson, an adventurous sportswoman, on a meandering trip by small boat on the St. Johns River. Rawlings wrote an article, "Hyacinth Drift," published in *Scribner's Magazine*, and would later use this vivid experience in *The Yearling*, when her young hero, Jody, tries to escape the pain of the death of his pet deer, by taking off up the great river in an old dugout canoe.¹⁸

Despite her deliberate isolation in Cross Creek, Rawlings was conscious of and concerned about her place in American literature. Her letters to Maxwell Perkins reflect a lively interest in what others were writing, her dedication to her art, and her struggle to produce works that would be worthy of his trust in her.¹⁹ She disliked characterizations of her writing as "regional," a term that often had dismissive overtones, and insisted that her writing strived to engage universal themes. At the same time, she admired what she defined as "regional literature," as exemplified by Thomas Hardy and Ellen Glasgow. Like them, she drew upon a well-loved and deeply understood background that became an integral part of the story or novel, where the lives of her characters serve as a vehicle for exploring the depth of human experience.²⁰ One critic has noted that, "It is Rawlings's love of her material that makes *Cross Creek* a book of literature instead of strictly regional writing. She respects her Cracker neighbors for their love and loyalty to their land, which provides so sparse a living from depleted farmland, disappearing game animals, and timbered woods."²¹

Marjorie Rawlings's literary works were written at the height of national interest in regionalism. In the work of countless American authors and artists, the regional assumed a powerful role. For many writers, it served as a vehicle for exploring major themes in the realm of modern literary realism. Federal support of this creative community during the Depression left a treasured legacy of regional paintings by major artists, and novelists and poets of this period figured at the center of a major movement in American letters. Rawlings scholar Gordon Bigelow points out that of the twenty-two fictional works awarded the Pulitzer Prize between 1927 and 1938, fifteen were for regionalist works by writers such as Faulkner, Wolfe, Steinbeck, Marquand, and Sherwood Anderson.²²

Despite the financial impact of the Depression, sixty thousand copies of *South Moon Under* were sold in the first quarter of its American release. The novel was also published in England and was short-listed for the French Prix Femina Americain Award in 1933.²³ Rawlings began research on her second novel, *Golden Apples*, right away. Set in the orange-growing region that she had come to love, Rawlings explored the struggle of man against nature in the transformation of untamed wilderness into a productive citrus grove (the Golden Apples of the title). She contrasted the angst-ridden character of a young Englishman banished to the savage land with the acceptance and love of the place by the native Crackers. Overly melodramatic and rushed to completion, the book did not, for the most part, please reviewers, and Rawlings herself admitted that it lacked literary value.²⁴ However, she wrote two of her finest comic short stories, "Alligators" and "Bennie and the Bird Dogs," while struggling with *Golden Apples*, and she continued to fill her notebooks with ideas for future writing projects.

¹⁷ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 83.

¹⁸ Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *The Yearling* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 387.

¹⁹ Tarr, *Max & Marjorie*, 315.

²⁰ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 140, 172.

²¹ Susan Schmidt, "Finding a Home: Rawlings's Cross Creek," *The Southern Literary Journal* 26 (Spring 1994): 48.

²² Gordon E. Bigelow, *Frontier Eden: The Literary Career of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1989), 70-71.

²³ Tarr, *Max & Marjorie*, 44-46, 109.

²⁴ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 112.

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Max Perkins, principal editor for Charles Scribner's Sons publishing firm, showed Marjorie Rawlings the same attention and editorial support that he gave his other authors, which included Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Thomas Wolfe. She came to rely on his judgment. When he suggested that she consider writing a book about a boy living in the Big Scrub, she followed his advice with great enthusiasm. The letters between Perkins and Rawlings vividly outline his influence on her literary growth as she tackled her third novel, *The Yearling*.²⁵

Rawlings was dubious about being labeled as a children's writer, and expressed her concerns to Perkins. When *The Yearling* appeared in 1938, Scribner's Sons marketed it as general fiction. Later, after it proved to be such a strong seller, the publisher engaged the well-regarded illustrator, N. C. Wyeth, to illustrate a new edition for its popular Illustrated Classics series. Wyeth's dramatic illustrations for *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* had become a landmark in book publishing, and his illustrations for *The Yearling* were no less effective. Perkins reassured Rawlings: "Most of the best books in the world are read both by children and adults. This is a characteristic of a great book, that it is both juvenile and adult, and that is the thing that assures it of a long life."²⁶ Rawlings noted later that the MGM production of *The Yearling* reflected Wyeth's art to a remarkable degree, faithfully reproducing many of his scenes and even the physical characteristics of some of the actors chosen for the film.²⁷

In 1939, *The Yearling* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and Rawlings was elected to the National Academy of Arts and Letters. National magazines solicited contributions from her, and she turned down many invitations to lecture in favor of remaining in Cross Creek. Despite her self-imposed isolation, she occasionally found herself enjoying the company of the other authors working with Max Perkins and formed friendships with Margaret Mitchell, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, A. J. Cronin, James Branch Cabell, and Zora Neale Hurston. Her admiration for the author Ellen Glasgow ripened into a strong, personal bond, and, at the time of her death in 1953, Rawlings was working on a biography of the eminent southern woman writer.²⁸

Charles Scribner's Sons recognized Rawlings as an important contributor to the American literary scene, and the excellent sales figures of *The Yearling* bore out the firm's belief in her. Maxwell Perkins wrote that he had "never known a book to be so universally liked." It remained at the top of best-seller lists for ninety-three weeks and sold 240,000 copies in its first year, an impressive figure for a book released during the depths of the Depression.²⁹ By the end of 1942, *The Yearling* had been translated into thirteen foreign languages and was distributed, like *Cross Creek* and *South Moon Under*, to thousands of servicemen in paperback Armed Forces editions.

Rawlings, who had written plays in college, began a dramatized version of *South Moon Under* (a project she later abandoned), and Scribner's induced her to compile and edit some of her short stories, which led to the publication of *When the Whippoorwill...* in 1940. She next turned to the writing of *Cross Creek*, an unusual book that is part autobiographical and part sketchbook. With Perkins's encouragement, she blended material she had been accumulating since her arrival in Florida more than a decade earlier. Using real people and real names, a practice that was to produce serious trouble in the future, she combined comic episodes with reflective passages. *Cross Creek* is a loosely woven fabric of personal impressions, lyrical descriptions, limited and subjective biographical revelations, riotous sketches, and humorous characterizations. An immediate success

²⁵ Tarr, *Max & Marjorie*, 116, 272, 279, 308-09.

²⁶ David Michaelis, *N. C. Wyeth: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 212.

²⁷ Michaelis, *N.C. Weyeth*, 274-275.

²⁸ Bigelow, *Frontier Eden*, 24, 34-36.

²⁹ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 151.

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when it was published early in 1942, *Cross Creek* was a Book-of-the-Month selection. Critics praised the literary quality of her works, which were read and cherished by thousands of readers from soldiers and sailors in war zones to school children and outdoorsmen, and many wrote admiring letters to her.³⁰ Scores of her readers commented on the delectable descriptions of food included in *Cross Creek*, so she suggested that Scribner's publish a collection of her best recipes, along with appropriate narrative, as *Cross Creek Cookery*, which came out at the end of 1942.

The publication of *Cross Creek* brought Rawlings applause from all quarters, save one of her neighbors mentioned in a brief passage. As Patricia Nassif Acton outlines in her book, *Invasion of Privacy: The 'Cross Creek' Trial of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, the author was sued by Zelma Cason, who took exception to the colorful (but accurate) description of Zelma included in the book. Rawlings refused to settle with Cason, who demanded damages of \$100,000. The author was convinced that "the principle of artistic freedom was at stake in the lawsuit, and she felt duty-bound to defend the rights of all authors."³¹ Attorney Phil May, who defended Rawlings, argued that if Zelma won her case, "no writer could safely write about his own life or factually portray the Florida people."³² After a series of appeals, the charge of "invasion of privacy" against Marjorie Rawlings was brought to trial on May 20, 1946, in Gainesville, the county seat of Alachua County.

Although the jury brought a verdict of "not guilty" on May 28, the plaintiff appealed to the Florida Supreme Court. The case dragged on for two more years, finally ending with a judgment against the author for the nominal sum of one dollar. Rawlings was surprised and disappointed that the trial was virtually ignored by the national press and in literary circles, for she had invested a considerable amount of time, money, and energy to fight for "the basic freedom of the press."³³

Marjorie Rawlings remarried in 1941. Her new husband, Norton Baskin, owned and managed the Castle Warden Hotel in St. Augustine, and she began to divide her time between the coastal resort city and her Cross Creek home, which still afforded her the isolation and quiet she needed to write. The trial and the war years, when her husband was stationed overseas in Burma as an ambulance driver, as well as recurring health problems, troubled Rawlings during the decade following the publication of *Cross Creek* and *Cross Creek Cookery*. In 1943 she embarked on her next major writing project, a novel that she called *The Sojourner*, based on the life of her grandfather Traphagen, a farmer in Michigan.³⁴ Perkins continued to encourage her to press on with the novel, despite her growing qualms. When her problems with *The Sojourner* became too distressing, she turned to writing short stories, some of them much darker and more experimental than those she had written before, one so much so that it was turned down by *The New Yorker*.³⁵

A measure of her versatility as a writer was another project Rawlings began during the late 1940s, a children's book she called *The Secret River*, an idea that she reminded Perkins was suggested in *Cross Creek*: "some day a poet will write a sad and lovely story of a Negro child." Perkins approved of her plans for the book, a blend of realism and fairy tale, but it was not published until several years after her death.³⁶ In letters to Perkins about *The Secret River*, Rawlings revealed her growing sensitivity to the issue of the portrayal of blacks in her

³⁰ Bigelow, *Frontier Eden*, 40-41.

³¹ Patricia Nassif Acton, *Invasion of Privacy, The "Cross Creek" Trial of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1988), 76.

³² Acton, *Invasion of Privacy*, 115.

³³ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁴ Tarr, *Max & Marjorie*, 546-551.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 580.

³⁶ *The Secret River* was honored in 1956 as a Newberry Medal Honor Book.

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writing. "I did not use any trace of Negro dialect . . . I wanted to give a complete dignity to all the Negroes in the story. . . . I deplore . . . the comic treatment of the Negro, and the unreasonable martyrdom, with emphasis on their tragedy of color and race." Rawlings had grown up in Washington, D.C., an essentially southern city, but had had little or no contact with blacks during her life before she came to Cross Creek in 1928. As she came to know and depend upon blacks who worked for her, such as members of the Mickens family, she came to recognize them as individuals and to appreciate their humanity.

Rawlings's correspondence, particularly her letters to her husband Norton, reveal her growing civil rights convictions and her awareness of racial prejudice. In one instance when the African American author, Zora Neale Hurston, visited her on impulse in December of 1943 to "help out" when Rawlings seemed to need it, Rawlings invited her guest to spend the night in her house, despite the very real fear that her white Cross Creek neighbors would find this objectionable.³⁷ As she was counting on the support of these neighbors during her upcoming trial, her decision was a courageous one.

Despite the paternalistic attitude sometimes expressed in her writings, the issue of racial equality was one that Rawlings came to feel strongly about, and she expressed her feelings with words and actions. Asked to contribute a short sketch on a war theme for the Writers War Board in 1943, she submitted a true story based on a southern soldier's comment on the Army's segregation policy: "if a man's good enough to die for his country, he's good enough to live with." The sketch was rejected as being too controversial. Rawlings wrote to a friend, "I have forced myself to take the final mental leap about the Negroes. There is no question but that we must go all out for 'full equality,' meaningless though the phrase may be. Anything else is the height of hypocrisy." In response to an editorial in a Jacksonville newspaper, she wrote that because of her mainly southern ancestry, she had taken segregation for granted, but that her views had changed. "No man is free as long as another is enslaved, and the slavery of the spirit is more stringent than that of the body."³⁸ She took on the local school board in 1952 and 1953 on behalf of one of Martha Mickens's granddaughters after she was denied a place on the whites-only school bus, which refused to pick up the youngster in Cross Creek and drop her off at the segregated Negro school in a nearby town.³⁹

In 1946, *The Yearling* was dropped from the reading list of some northern schools because it contained passages that were offensive to blacks. For the same reason, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* suffered the same fate. Rawlings defended the language in her book, in particular the use of "nigger" in dialogue, as being true to the period of the book (the late 1800s). However, she stated that the word itself was totally unacceptable as used "in ordinary speech or casually in print."⁴⁰ Marjorie Rawlings died in 1953, before the Civil Rights Movement, and her most widely read works were published in the 1930s and 1940s at a time when sensitivity to racial content was not part of mainstream American literature. She was, in many ways, ahead of her time in her attitudes toward equality between blacks and whites.

The sudden death of Maxwell Perkins in June of 1947 was a devastating blow to Marjorie Rawlings. She heard the news in Van Hornesville, New York, where she had retreated to work on *The Sojourner*. She would profoundly miss his wise counsel as she continued to work on the novel. In the meantime, *The New Yorker* and other magazines were eager to publish more of her short stories, and she worked on a movie script for MGM that was later rejected, much to her relief. She was furious at the way that MGM had earlier treated the

³⁷ Tarr, *The Private Marjorie*, 208-211.

³⁸ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 231-232.

³⁹ Alachua County Board of Public Administration Minutes. Book 11, July 1952—August 1956. Page 1603, September 9, 1952; page 1619, January 13, 1952; page 1631, March 10, 1953.

⁴⁰ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 273.

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production of a story, “Mountain Prelude,” that had originally appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*.⁴¹

Rawlings completed the first draft of *The Sojourner* in mid-1950 but revisions went slowly, partly due to medical problems and partly to her dependence on alcohol. Although she could always count on the staunch support of her husband, Norton Baskin, family problems with her younger brother, Arthur, and others who were dependent upon her also took their toll. She never found an editor that matched Maxwell Perkins, who could firmly press her on, as she put it, in a “beautiful, quiet way that you thought was your own idea.” Scribner’s launched *The Sojourner* in January of 1953 and simultaneously published an English edition.⁴² The novel, which had taken her more than a decade to write, embraced many aspects of Marjorie Rawlings’s philosophy about cosmic awareness, loneliness and alienation, human relationships, and time. The reviews were mixed: some found it tedious, while others praised its warmth and wisdom.

Despite a sense of exhaustion after the publication of *The Sojourner*, Rawlings immediately began research for the biography of southern writer Ellen Glasgow, who had died in November of 1945, a task Rawlings estimated would take four or five years to complete. She spent considerable time in Richmond, Virginia, Glasgow’s home town, interviewing her friends and family. Rawlings admired Glasgow’s novels and short stories and her studies on the art of writing, and she hoped to “be able to bring Ellen to life again for those who did not have the good fortune of knowing her.”⁴³

Rawlings died suddenly in Flagler Hospital in St. Augustine, on December 12, 1953. Telegrams, notes, and letters of condolence, many from people who knew her only through her writing, poured in to her husband, Norton Baskin.⁴⁴ Rawlings is buried about seven miles from her Cross Creek home, in the Antioch Cemetery. Her simple grave marker bears the following inscription:

MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS
1896-1953
wife of
NORTON BASKIN

THROUGH HER WRITINGS SHE ENDEARED
HERSELF TO
THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Literary Criticism

Critical and scholarly evaluation of the work of Marjorie Rawlings is an ongoing process, the mark of a writer whose work continues to interest new generations. Rawlings wanted her work to be taken seriously and pitted herself against the masculine writers of her day such as Hemingway, Wolfe, and Fitzgerald. Yet her work is distinctively her own voice, one that was more nuanced than many other women writers of the period, particularly those writing of life in the South. As a protégé of Maxwell Perkins, she belonged to a literary elite and moved easily in the company of these literary giants, becoming a national celebrity recognized for the timeless quality of her work.

⁴¹ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 278, 291.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 315, 320, 322.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 332, 347.

⁴⁴ See Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Collection, Smathers Library, University of Florida, Gainesville.

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Her best-known work, *The Yearling*, focuses on the perspective of young Jody Baxter and his father, and reflects the feminine point of view of Ma Baxter mainly in reference to the needs of the men in her life. Many of the short stories that Rawlings wrote also mirror the point of view of men, such as “Alligators” and “The Enemy,” both included in her fourth book, *When the Whippoorwill*. . . . Even her irrepressible Quincy Dover character (modeled partly on herself) in “Cocks Must Crow,” a tale featuring the sport of cock fighting, endorses the prevailing social notion of her time that a wife’s role is to prop up the masculinity of her husband, no matter what foolishness he is up to: “Now he’d won, and he was a man again. And I knowed that cocks must crow.”⁴⁵

One critic noted that Rawlings was not included in *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*, a collection of essays examining southern women’s writing that appeared in 1993, perhaps because *The Yearling*, her most acclaimed work, is not a “woman’s story.”⁴⁶ It can be argued, however, that Rawlings, like other serious female writers who were constrained by the very conservative culture of the critical and literary world, found valid ways of negotiating the tension of gender issues. To be accepted and to have her work taken seriously, she felt the need to separate her identity as a woman from that of her identity as a writer. Moreover, Rawlings thoroughly enjoyed the company of men and indulged in hunting, fishing, and even rattlesnake round-ups with great enthusiasm, as she reveals in *Cross Creek*. Writing about the “man’s world” of her time and place came naturally and genuinely interested her. Notwithstanding the subdued role of the mother, Ora Baxter, in *The Yearling*, which seems quite appropriate since her intention was to write “a book about a boy in the scrub,” Rawlings presents a broad spectrum of women in her novels and short stories. Strong women like Mattie Syles in her award-winning story “Gal Young ‘Un,” Camilla Van Dyne in *Golden Apples*, and her friend Dessie in “Hyacinth Drift” take charge of their lives, while others, like Florry in “Jacob’s Ladder” and Piety in *South Moon Under*, give voice to the quiet women who endure life with inner strength, matching the same attachment to the land and the life force of the men Rawlings writes about.

Using the feminist perspective in a novel context, Janet Boyd eloquently deconstructs “Gal Young Un,” the short story that won Rawlings the O’Henry prize in 1933, as a Cinderella story, repositioning the characters to reveal Freudian forces with the young un’, Elly, as Cinderella-daughter, Mattie Syles as her wicked stepmother-rescuer, and Elly’s blue kid shoes as the glass slippers.⁴⁷

John Lowe points out that Rawlings has much to say about contemporary issues and takes a closer look at her work in his review of the construction and deconstruction of masculinity in *The Yearling*. He gives Rawlings her due for revealing “the ambiguous nature of American manhood, its cruel tests, its noble potential, and its all-too-frequent failures.” He cites the words of Penny Baxter to his son Jody, after he has to destroy his pet deer that has ravaged the family’s crops: “Life knocks a man down and he gits up and it knocks him down agin. . . . I’ve wanted life to be easy for you. Easier’n ‘twas for me. . . . What’s he to do when he gits knocked down? Why, take it for his share and goes on.” Rawlings indicates that Penny’s hopes for his son are universal, the way all men hope that their sons will be able to enjoy an idyllic boyhood, even as they prepare them to assume the burdens and responsibilities of manhood.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *The Yearling* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938); *When the Whippoorwill* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1933).

⁴⁶ Rhonda Morris, “Engendering Fictions: Rawlings and a Female Tradition of Southern Writing,” *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 7 (1996): 27-40.

⁴⁷ Janet L. Boyd, “Cinderella in the Swamp: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s Fractured Fairy Tale,” *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 2 (1989-1990): 4-5.

⁴⁸ John Lowe “The Construction and Deconstruction of Masculinity in *The Yearling*,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 57 (Spring 2004): 231.

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After ending her unhappy marriage to Charles Rawlings in 1933, Marjorie Rawlings chose to stay alone at Cross Creek, to manage her orange grove by herself, and to put her lifelong literary ambitions to the test. One critic has likened her struggles to those of Isak Dineson, Virginia Woolf, and Tillie Olsen as she gained confidence in herself as a woman and as a writer.⁴⁹

A wider critical perspective brings closer attention to the work of Marjorie Rawlings, written in the particularly fertile period of American literature between the two world wars.⁵⁰ She began writing seriously while she was a student at the University of Wisconsin during World War I, and her marriage to Charles Rawlings was postponed a year after their graduation while he served in the US Army until the end of the war. He was stationed at a camp on Long Island while she worked in New York City, writing for the War Work Council of the Y.W.C.A. The Great Depression that plunged the nation into economic turmoil between the wars is not a dominant theme in the stories and novels Rawlings wrote during the 1930s, for her part of the world had always endured poverty and hard times. Florry and Mart, the young couple in “Jacob’s Ladder,” might be a model for other Americans cut adrift from their homes to wander in search of security, but Rawlings does not blame their plight on government policies or political systems. They are desperately poor, but self-sufficient as they leave a job that compromised their dignity and choose to “see kin we make us a livin’ salt-water fishin’ They packed their few belongings in cardboard cartons and set off on foot before dawn.” The Depression did have an impact on sales of her three major works, released when book sales in general slumped during the 1930s.⁵¹

The Second World War was a time of great personal anxiety rather than literary creativity for Marjorie Rawlings. Her second husband, Norton Baskin, over-age for service in the military, volunteered with the American Friends Service in July of 1943 as an ambulance driver and was assigned to a unit in Burma. Much of her writing during 1943 and 1944 consisted of almost daily letters to Baskin.⁵² She also spent a great deal of time carrying on a “voluminous correspondence” with servicemen who wrote to her in appreciation of her books that came their way through the Armed Services editions of *The Yearling*, *South Moon Under*, and *Cross Creek*. She considered this her most important contribution to the war effort.⁵³

Japanese critic Hiroshi Tsunemoto places Rawlings high in the ranks of other American writers who have taken nature and the environment as their major themes. In “A Female Thoreau in Florida” he considers her to be in the mainstream of the literary genre of nature writing along with Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Henry David Thoreau.⁵⁴ Like Thoreau’s move to Walden Pond, Rawlings’s move to Cross Creek brought her harmony with the environment that she had not found while living in cities. Writing about nature from a personal and spiritual perspective was one of the strongest aspects of the works of Marjorie Rawlings, whether she is reflecting her own feelings in *Cross Creek* or that of the many characters in her stories and novels who are conscious of the natural beauty and fragility of the land they inhabit. Her cosmic view of nature shifts from a vivid description of a wild sow and her litter, “Clean and fresh as the sunshine, the birth-damp still upon them,” to the observation that “The jungle hammock breathed. . . . The universe breathed, and the world inside it breathed the same breath.”⁵⁵ Rawlings gladly surrendered to her natural surrounding to find her literary

⁴⁹ Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, “Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Woman, Writer and Resident of Cross Creek,” *Rawlings Journal* 1 (1988): 3-4.

⁵⁰ Morris, “Engendering Fictions,” 36.

⁵¹ Tarr, *Max & Marjorie*, 95-96.

⁵² Tarr, *The Private Marjorie*.

⁵³ Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, May 17, 1953. The comment comes from the fifth in a series of five autobiographical articles published in the *Los Angeles Times*.

⁵⁴ Hiroshi Tsunemoto, “A Female Thoreau in Florida,” *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 8 (1997): 105.

⁵⁵ Rawlings, *Cross Creek*, 46.

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voice. Her closing passage in *Cross Creek*, that the earth “may be borrowed but not bought. It may be used, but not owned,” has become a mantra for other environmental writers.

Christian Moe, in reviewing her works a decade ago, considers a somewhat different aspect of her writing, the revelation of the pastoral, agricultural landscape she became a part of as the owner of a productive orange grove. He cites this tie to the land that put bread on her table, as it did for the people she wrote about: “Rawlings is a pastoral writer of percipience and power.”⁵⁶ Three of her central characters, Penny Baxter in *The Yearling*, Luke Brinley, the Cracker grove man in *Golden Apples*, and Ase Linden in *The Sojourner*, identify Rawlings in the American pastoral tradition, setting these novels in the “middle landscape,” a symbolic space between the corrupt city and the barbaric wilderness.⁵⁷

A growing interest in autobiographical works written by women has focused critical attention on *Cross Creek*, a book that Rawlings, like many female autobiographers, found emotionally difficult to write. It took her nearly two years to find the structural scheme and narrative tone that she was seeking, one that focused more often on other persons than on herself and her work as a writer. Estelle Jelenek notes that this is typical of women, whereas the autobiographies of men tend to place the author at center stage as he holds up a mirror of his era. Patricia Meyer Spacks would call the strategy Rawlings uses in *Cross Creek* the self in hiding as she merges her own identity with that of her neighbors.⁵⁸ Thomas Dukes explores a similar theme, noting the role of the author as an outsider, a woman of privilege, and judges *Cross Creek* as “unusually democratic in accepting the experience of all women, privileged or otherwise, as worthy of recording.”⁵⁹

Readers of the works of Marjorie Rawlings today might term her a racist, particularly for her paternalistic observations about the blacks who worked for her in *Cross Creek*.⁶⁰ Like white southern authors such as William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor who wrote before the Civil Rights Movement, she expressed the language and attitudes of southern life as she found it. Because she died in 1953, she was unable to repudiate the racist marks against her. But it is clear from her actions, her correspondence and from her friendship with Zora Neale Hurston and Mary McLeod Bethune, that she embraced integration and was not shy about expressing her feelings about segregation. Rawlings was a frequent speaker at Florida Normal and Industrial College in St. Augustine. It was at this small African American institution that Rawlings first met Hurston, who was teaching summer literature courses in 1943.⁶¹ Impressed with her new friend, Rawlings invited her to tea at her husband’s hotel, and then had qualms about the social occasion and its impact on the whites-only hotel. The independent-minded black woman deftly avoided upsetting local mores by coming in through the kitchen and spent the afternoon charming Rawlings and her husband.

Florida native Zora Neale Hurston also set many of her stories in rural places in the state and she praised Rawlings: “You have written the best thing on Negroes of any white writer who has ever lived.”⁶² In a 1943 letter, Hurston commented: “You did a thing I like in dealing with your Negro characters. You looked at them

⁵⁶ Christian Moe, “Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Overview,” in *Reference Guide to American Literature*, 3rd ed., edited by Jim Kamp (New York: St. James Press, 1994).

⁵⁷ Bigelow, *Frontier Eden*, 120-121, 126.

⁵⁸ Prenshaw, “Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings,” 11-13.

⁵⁹ Thomas Dukes, “Cross Creek as the Autobiography of an Alienated Woman,” *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature*, 2 (1989-1990): 94.

⁶⁰ James H. Watkins, “Self-Location and the Racial Other: Reading *Cross Creek* as Southern Autobiography,” *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 11 (2002): 15-16.

⁶¹ Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 350.

⁶² Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, 370.

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and saw them as they are.”⁶³ Hurston and Rawlings became good friends, and Hurston was a guest at Rawlings’s home in Cross Creek on several occasions. In time, Rawlings would recommend her fellow writer to her editor, Maxwell Perkins, who accepted the manuscript of Hurston’s novel, *Seraph on the Suwannee* for Scribner’s. “I am delighted that you may publish Zora Neale Hurston’s next book. I feel that she has a very great talent.”⁶⁴ Marjorie Rawlings was also impressed by black educator Mary McLeod Bethune, corresponded with her, visited her, and spoke at a program honoring Bethune at Florida A & M University in Tallahassee. When Rawlings was invited by then all-black Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, to speak to students and faculty on writing and the use of folk materials, she stayed at the home of the first black president of the university, Charles S. Johnson.

Rawlings’s interest and support of young black writers extended to bequests in her will, written in 1949. She set aside scholarship funds specifically for creative writing students and stipulated “that some portion of the fund must be continuously available for American Negro students.”⁶⁵ Perhaps more telling is the impression she left on those who worked for her. Sissie, one of Martha Mickens’s daughters, spontaneously confided her impression of Rawlings to Zora Neale Hurston during that writer’s visit to Cross Creek: “She don’t want you to be low and humble. She wants you to be up.”⁶⁶

Marjorie Rawlings first broke into print with short stories, a format she would continue to work with throughout her career. She moved from the “local color” approach of “Cracker Chidlings,” her first work to appear in a major publication, *Scribner’s Magazine*, to a more thoughtful, literary style. Her best writing, according to critics, is her Florida fiction, “stories such as *A Crop of Beans* and *Jacob’s Ladder* that begin with local fact but suggest the universal. She thus belongs to the tradition of such writers as John Steinbeck, Eudora Welty, and William Faulkner.”⁶⁷ “Gal Young ‘Un,” which won the O. Henry Prize in 1933, is one of her most fully realized and dramatic short stories. It was successfully adapted for film in 1980. Late in her career, her short stories took on a darker tone with more overt psychological themes. “The Pelican’s Shadow,” where a young wife comes to realize, and accept, the stifling role she has chosen, may reflect Rawlings’s doubts about her own attitude toward marriage. This story and four others that appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine between 1940 and 1945 are less popular than her Florida Cracker tales, but reveal her efforts to break free of the literary boundaries she had set for herself in the 1930s.

In 1949, Marjorie Rawlings gave her manuscripts and papers to the University of Florida library. She had developed close ties with the faculty in the Department of English and sometimes addressed the department’s creative writing classes. This association with the university led to her decision to leave her Cross Creek property to the UF Foundation, to the ongoing expansion of the Rawlings collection, and to the launching of *The Rawlings Journal* in 1988 (now *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature*), and to the founding and growth of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, which meets annually to review papers and scholarly works inspired by the author.⁶⁸ A number of theses and dissertations have explored various facets of her literary works such as her use of folklore, Cracker dialogue, romantic realism, and nature imagery. A documentary film, “Creative Fire: The Life of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings,” produced in 2002 by Rachel Sandals

⁶³ Letter to Rawlings from Hurston, May 16, 1943, Box 1502, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Collection, Smathers Library, University of Florida.

⁶⁴ Silverthorne, 232; Tarr, *Max and Marjorie*, 603-609. Scribner’s published Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Seraph on the Suwannee* in 1948.

⁶⁵ Silverthorne, 232, 287; Last Will and Testament of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, December 22, 1949, 6.

⁶⁶ Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, 370.

⁶⁷ Victor Lasseter, *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 102: American Short-Story Writers, 1910-1945* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University, The Gale Group, 1991), 248-253.

⁶⁸ Archives of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, Smathers Library, University of Florida. The Society was founded in 1987.

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and David Striepe, includes informal film footage of Rawlings and interviews with some of her close associates.

Teachers in public and private schools throughout the United States continue to include the works of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in their curricula.⁶⁹ *The Yearling* has become “an American classic,” just as Maxwell Perkins predicted when it was first published in 1938. Although Rawlings insisted that *The Yearling* was a book “about” a boy, not a book “for boys,” after more than half a century it still has a secure place on library shelves and with new generations of young readers.⁷⁰ It has the timeless appeal of a great literary work with unforgettable characters, a vivid setting, and a plot and theme related to universal experiences. Translated into more than a dozen languages, the book transports youngsters throughout the world into the north Florida scrub country of the late nineteenth century, just as they have been to colonial India by Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, or to the banks and eddies of the Mississippi River by Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. For the benefit of students and teachers who cannot visit the author’s house, a website has been created to provide a gallery of photographs of the Rawlings home and its environs.⁷¹

The literary works of Marjorie Rawlings have resulted in a number of media adaptations. A movie version of *The Yearling* was released in 1946 by MGM to excellent reception by critics and viewers. It was praised for its sensitivity and its vitality, and Rawlings was pleased with the fidelity of the production to her literary intentions.⁷² In 1948 MGM also produced “The Sun Comes Up” a movie based on one of Rawlings’s short stories, “Mountain Prelude.” Another short story, “Gal Young Un,” was adapted for film in 1980, and in 1983 “Cross Creek,” starring Mary Steenbergen as Marjorie Rawlings, was released by Universal. A reading of *The Yearling* by David Wayne, Eileen Heckart, and Luke Yankee is available on record and cassette from Caedmon. A dramatic, musical version of *The Yearling*, written by Lore Noto with music by Michael Leonard, reached Broadway in 1965 but was not successful. In 2004, a made-for-television version of *The Yearling* was released. While far from the quality of the 1946 version, this dramatization indicates a continuing interest in Rawlings’s classic story.⁷³

Rodger Tarr, Illinois State University Distinguished Professor Emeritus, who has edited six books on Rawlings’s writings, reminds us that she was hardly a recluse at her Cross Creek retreat. Rawlings was a special guest of her friend Margaret Mitchell at the premier of *Gone with the Wind*, an overnight guest of Eleanor Roosevelt in the White House, an honored guest at the hooding of Robert Frost at Colgate University, and a close friend of Owen D. Young, a founder of RCA and CEO of General Electric.

Tarr notes that in her lecture, “Regional Literature of the South,” delivered to the National Council of Teachers in 1940, Rawlings stressed that she wrote about the soul of humanity and that her efforts as a writer were to chronicle the human experience that has no boundaries. He quotes her close friend, Margaret Mitchell, who wrote to Rawlings, “Your versatility is a marvelous thing. There is no one today writing the way you write or the type of things you write. There have been all too few writers like you in the past. Yours is truly an American gift. You are a born perfect storyteller.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Personal communication from Ellen Giallonardo, secondary school teacher, included a six-week unit on *The Yearling* for middle school and high school students. Among the study guides available are *Elements of Literature: A Study Guide for the Yearling* and *The Yearling Progeny Press Study Guide*.

⁷⁰ Tarr, *Max and Marjorie*, 398.

⁷¹ Exploring Florida: Social Studies Resources for Students and Teachers. Website Produced by the Florida Center for Instructional Technology, College of Education, University of South Florida, 2002.

⁷² Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 275.

⁷³ Sally E. Barry and Robert L. McLaughlin, “From Baxter’s Island to Broadway: *The Yearling* Musical,” *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 7 (1996): 11-26. The 2004 version of *The Yearling* was produced by Sandra Birnhak.

⁷⁴ Rodger Tarr, letter, “To the Attention of the Committee on National Landmarks,” April 20, 2005.

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Significance of the Rawlings House and Farm Yard at 18700 South CR325, Cross Creek, Florida

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings House and Farm Yard is significant as the home of the American author, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. The writer occupied the house from 1928 until her death in 1953. The house and the surrounding property were bequeathed to the University of Florida Endowment Corporation upon the death of Mrs. Rawlings in 1953, according to the terms of her will.⁷⁵ In 1970 the Rawlings house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.⁷⁶ Since 1970 the property has been maintained by the State of Florida and is operated as the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park. In 1988, the Rawlings home was recognized with an award as a Literary Landmark.⁷⁷

Except for a few short sojourns and the period after her marriage to Norton Baskin in 1941, when she divided her time between her Cross Creek residence and either the Castle Warden Hotel operated by Baskin in St. Augustine, the beachfront cottage she purchased in Crescent Beach, Florida, or the house she bought in 1947 in Van Hornesville, New York, Rawlings considered Cross Creek her real home. Literary figures such as Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, and Thornton Wilder visited Mrs. Rawlings in Cross Creek, enjoying her hospitality and the unique quality of her country home.⁷⁸

Marjorie Rawlings's 1943 chronicle, *Cross Creek*, is peppered with precise, comic, and reflective vignettes of the farmhouse, and the house itself is a minor chord in the writer's reflections on life in this rural village. Whether she is describing "The Evolution of Comfort" in fashioning an indoor bathroom, paid for with a check from one of her short stories, or placing the reader at the heart of a hurricane as "The wind strikes the farmhouse a physical blow," battering her verandah and carrying off "hand-hewn cypress shingles . . . loose in the lichened roof," Rawlings uses her response to her home in much the same way that Thomas Wolfe used his emotional reaction to his mother's boarding house in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Despite its initial impression, "The farmhouse was all dinginess." Rawlings writes, "I . . . knew the old grove and farmhouse at once as home."

Like Connemara, Carl Sandburg's farm in Flat Rock, North Carolina, the Rawlings house still teems with life. Instead of the prize-winning goats on the Sandburg farm, visitors to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawling Historic State Park will find ducks and chickens roaming around the yard; work going on in the garden, the grove, and the kitchen; and a cat dozing on a sunny porch. A vintage typewriter is still on the round table on the front porch, as iconic as the one in Ernest Hemingway's writing studio in the rear of his Key West house.⁷⁹

The Rawlings house has been featured for decades in publications dealing with historic sites and buildings. The Federal Writers Project book, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*, part of the American Guide Series sponsored by the WPA in the 1930s, mentions Rawlings and her home, already considered a worthwhile place for visitors to the state to know about. *Historic Homes of America* devotes three pages to text and photographs of the Rawlings home, and *The Ideals Guide to Literary Places in the U.S.* includes the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings State Historic Site among the fifty-nine homes and birthplaces of American authors.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Last Will and Testament of Marjorie Kinnan Baskin, December 22, 1949. A copy of the will is in the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Collection at the Smathers Library, University of Florida.

⁷⁶ John McDermott, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Home, June 1970.

⁷⁷ Designation by the Literary Landmark Association, Frederick G. Ruffner, President, April 7, 1988.

⁷⁸ Silverthorne, *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, 114-115, 145, 317.

⁷⁹ Connemara, the Carl Sandburg home in Flat Rock, NC, is a National Historic Landmark (NC-11), as is the Key West home of Ernest Hemingway (FL-20) and the home of Zora Neale Hurston (FL-23).

⁸⁰ Federal Writers Project, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 145, 530, 534; James Tackach, *Historic Homes of America* (New York: Moore & Moore Publishing, 1990), 6, 114-116; Michelle Prater Burke,

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Since the Rawlings house and farm opened to the public as a Florida State Park in 1970, a steady stream of visitors from all walks of life, and from all over the world, have confirmed the enduring interest in her Cross Creek home. In 2004, more than 20,000 individuals came, drawn as Rawlings once was to the necessity “to leave the impersonal highway, to step inside the rusty gate and close it behind. . . .”⁸¹

Architects and architectural students have studied the Rawlings house for decades as a notable example of the Cracker (descendants of pioneer settlers) style of architecture, derived from a variety of influences to suit the climate and available technology of the rural South. Because of the Rawlings legacy and the ongoing protection of the house as a historic state park, the house still looks much as it did in the 1930s. For this reason, those interested in historic preservation consider it a rare and valuable example of southern vernacular architecture.

Justification of Period of Significance

The period of significance reflects the twenty-five years that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings occupied the house. All of her major works were written here, and she included descriptions of the house and its surroundings in her memoir, *Cross Creek*. For Rawlings, her sojourn in Cross Creek would inform her best writing.

The Cross Creek house possesses exceptional significance for its association with the life and literary career of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, a major American author.

Other Properties Associated with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

Other properties associated with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings are a beachfront house, privately owned and still standing at 6600 Broward Avenue, Crescent Beach, Florida, and the Castle Warden Hotel in St. Augustine, now the Ripley Believe It or Not attraction. Rawlings purchased the beach house in 1939 with proceeds from *The Yearling*, and occupied the penthouse suite at the hotel after she married Norton Baskin, the owner/manager of the hotel, in 1941, when she was not at Cross Creek. In the 1940s, Rawlings became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Owen D. Young, who lived during the winter months at their Washington Oaks estate south of St. Augustine. (This property is now the Washington Oaks Gardens State Park at 6400 North Oceanshore Boulevard, Palm Coast, Florida.) The Youngs arranged for Rawlings to rent a house in Mr. Young’s hometown, Van Hornesville, New York, while she was working on the manuscript of her last novel, *The Sojourner*, set on a northern farm. In 1947, she purchased a house in Van Hornesville, which is still standing.⁸²

The Ideals Guide to Literary Places in the U.S. (Nashville, TN: Ideals Publications, 1998), 77-79

⁸¹ Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *Cross Creek* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942), 15.

⁸² Rodger L. Tarr, ed., *The Private Marjorie: The Love Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings to Norton S. Baskin* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 8, 487, 492.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- ___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
[X] Previously Listed in the National Register
___ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
___ Designated a National Historic Landmark>
___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Locations of Additional Data:

- ___ State Historic Preservation Office
[X] Other State Agency (Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Recreation and Parks)
___ Federal Agency
___ Local Government
[X] University (Smathers Library, University of Florida, Gainesville)
[X] Other (Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, Cross Creek)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Approximately 3 acres

Table with 3 columns: UTM References, Zone, Easting, Northing. Values: 17, 387540, 3261731

Verbal Boundary Description: Commence at the intersection of the north line of Lot 3, Kennedy Survey and the west right of way of County Road 325 and run south 526 feet along the east fence line, then 165 feet along the south fence line to a concrete State Public Land Boundary Marker. Run northwest 335 feet along the west fence line to another concrete State Public Land Boundary Marker. Run in a northeasterly direction approximately 100 feet to the north line of Lot 3, then 200 feet to point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: The property described above is the parcel historically associated with the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings House and includes the house, garden, grove, and associated farm structures. It comprises approximately three acres of the seventy-four-acre Armstrong place purchased by Charles and Marjorie Rawlings in 1928.

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