

Libraries Acquire Additional Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Letters

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The George A. Smathers Libraries acquired in 2002 a small treasure of forty-five Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings letters to supplement its extensive holdings of papers of the Pulitzer Prize winning author. Acquired from Rawlings collector and friend, Phil May, Jr., of Jacksonville, the letters were written to a diverse group of associates and friends, including her husband, her attorney, her agents, and a journalist friend. Foreign translations and publications of her works, Rawlings' health, views on race and politics, and a marital dispute with her first husband are among the subject matter.

The largest number of letters was written to Bernice Baumgarten, who handled foreign rights in the office of Carl Brandt, Rawlings' principal agent. One of the principal topics concerns the snafu in which the publisher – Charles Scribner's – placed the English rights to Rawlings' first novel, *South Moon Under*, with a British publisher without Rawlings' consent. Other letters concern translations of her works into various foreign languages and editions. The letters were

part of the agent's files, which were turned over to Norton Baskin, Rawlings' second husband, after her death. The acquisition reunites the letters with the remainder of the Brandt file, already in the Smathers Libraries.

Six letters, 1944-1949, to her friend and sister writer Sigrid Arne provide excellent insight into a variety of personal topics. Two of the letters give excellent descriptions of Norton Baskin's experiences on the Burma-India Front in World War II. Rawlings also reports on entertaining politician Wendell Willkie at Cross Creek, gossips about her former husband Charles A. Rawlings, Jr., reports on the Cross Creek Trial, in which she was eventually found liable for invasion of privacy, and tells of her public argument with Florida governor Millard Caldwell over racial segregation.

Five letters are to her first husband Charles Rawlings. Written in the fall of 1922, while Charles was traveling as a shoe company representative. She correctly expresses her confidence that she can make her living as a writer, but wrongly predicts that she will write a great feminist novel.

This interesting and valuable addition of letters raises the total number of her letters in the Smathers Libraries to more than 1,400, about half of which have become publicly accessible only within the last four years, greatly expanding the source material available to scholars and to readers of her works.

Phil May, Jr. first visited Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings when he was ten years old along with his father, who was her attorney. Because the



trip from Jacksonville to Cross Creek was a long one, often traveled on dirt roads, they would spend the night and sit around the fire and talk. May got to know Rawlings and her husband Norton Baskin well. After Rawlings' death, May used to visit Baskin at his Crescent Beach house and they became close friends. Over the years May has collected all kinds of Rawlings materials – books, ephemera, and photos. Baskin passed along the letters to May knowing he wanted to preserve as much as possible about Rawlings' life.