

# A LASTING LITERARY IMPRESSION

By Mary Edith Estes Arnold, AM/Missouri, Fraternity Archivist

As you come across the latest stamp in the U.S. Postal Service's literary arts commemorative series, take note of a sister!

American novelist Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Psi/Wisconsin, is the most recent inductee into the series. She is the 24th among American literary giants with their own stamps, including her friends Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zora Neale Hurston.

Rawlings is best known for the Pulitzer prize-winning novel *The Yearling* and her memoir, *Cross Creek*. Her numerous short stories, novels, and non-fiction works usually were set in the Florida backwoods

southeast of Gainesville where she settled with her first husband—her college sweetheart—in 1928.

Young Marjorie Kinnan from Washington, DC, entered the University of Wisconsin in 1914, when Psi Chapter activities included hayrides and bonfires, matinee dances and cotillions—happy times swirling around classes and studies. She was an active student, writing for a campus magazine, performing in plays, and editing the university yearbook.

Two decades before *The Yearling* earned Rawlings the 1939 Pulitzer Prize, Kappa Alpha Theta members read her thoughtful words in the *Kappa Alpha Theta Journal* describing life on the Wisconsin campus. She was chapter correspondent just as the United States was drawn into the war raging across Europe in 1917.

"...war cast its shadow over our hearts unconsciously. Its influence was seen in rushing this fall, not only in Red Cross luncheons, war dinners, and the omnipresent knitting, but in the simplicity and informality of the parties. Psi has pledged herself to a thoughtful economy in dress, food, and entertainment. ...we are looking forward to a busy season of larger service and deeper purpose. It seems to us a time when



The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings 41-cent stamp was first issued February 21, 2008.

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Kappa Alpha Theta must justify her existence by freedom from all pettiness, narrowness, and selfishness." (*Journal*, January 1918)

"...The University seemed almost the same as in old days, when, at Home-coming [sic] time this fall, hundreds of "dear departed" [draftees and graduates] walked once more around the campus; many of them in uniform, very self-conscious in their new role, and very stern under the weight of a great determination. Have you noticed how they have aged—these youngsters? The boys we have played with have become men over night, and although it hurts to see it, there is consolation in the fact that they seem infinitely finer and deeper than before. And it does seem so much harder, doesn't it, to stay home and just think!..." (*Journal*, January 1918)

The sensitive student captured the campus atmosphere in 1917 and '18 just as—decades later—the sensitive writer would capture the light and shadows of the Florida backwoods reflected in the people and the place she dearly loved. A half-century later, she is still being read and honored. Smile when you see the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings stamp in your mailbox. She's one of our own! ◆