



• *Author*

Margaret Munnerlyn Mitchell Marsh

1900–1949

Inducted 1994

Born in Atlanta in 1900, Margaret Mitchell grew up surrounded by relatives who told endless tales of the Civil War and Reconstruction. She knew those who were relics of a destroyed culture, and those who had put aside gentility for survival. Her mother instilled in her that education was her only security. She attended Smith College but had to come home when her mother fell ill. After her mother's death, Margaret resolved that she had to make a home for her father and brother, so she left college and returned to Atlanta. In 1923, she became a feature writer for the Atlanta Journal, and in 1925, she married John Marsh, a public relations officer for Georgia Power.

She found most of her assignments unfulfilling, and she soon left to try writing fiction more to her own taste. Her own harshest critic, she would not try to get her work published. She began to write *Gone with the Wind* in 1926, while recovering from an automobile accident. Over the next eight years she painstakingly researched for historical accuracy. She accumulated thousands of pages of manuscript. Here is how she later described her life's labor: "When I look back on these last years of struggling to find time to write between deaths in the family, illness in the family and among friends which lasted months and even years, childbirths (not my own), divorces and neuroses among friends, my own ill health and four fine auto accidents ... it all seems like a nightmare. I wouldn't tackle it again for anything. Just as soon as I sat down to write, somebody I loved would decide to have their gall-bladder removed. ..."

In 1934, an editor from Macmillan's Publishers came to Atlanta seeking new authors. He was referred to John and Margaret Marsh as people who knew Atlanta's literary scene. She steered him to several prospects, but didn't mention her own work. A friend told him that she was writing a novel, but she denied it. On the night before he was to leave Atlanta, she appeared at his hotel-room door with her still imperfect, mountainous manuscript and left it with him for better or for worse.

The rest of the story is well-known: the book that sold more copies worldwide than any other book except the Bible; and the making of the movie version, which grossed more money than any film before. It was a success she had never anticipated, and never really understood. She resisted all pleas that she continue to write. She told a New York Times reviewer: "I not only do not intend to set about another book too soon, but,

"I vaguely recall that I just sat down and began to write a book to occupy my time. And after I finished it and was able to walk again, I put the book away and forgot about it for years."

– Margaret Mitchell

thank God, never intend to write another one if I keep my sanity. I have heard other writers make that same remark and then observed that they were suddenly stricken with a novel while in their bath, or

woke up in the night with a violent attack of short story. I hope Fate will be kinder to me; I wouldn't go through this again for anything." She only tried to answer the mountains of fan mail that she received.

During World War II, she lent her prestige to fundraising for the Red Cross and the U. S. War Bonds. In 1949, she was struck by a speeding automobile in downtown Atlanta. And so died a Georgia woman who had created more than just a story out of her own imagination; she had created a book whose importance has expanded beyond the limits of the printed page to become a part of our national mythology.

Additional Resources

Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library
University of Georgia Libraries
Athens
(706) 542-3251

Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library
(404) 730-1700

Library and Archives
Atlanta History Center
(404) 814-4000