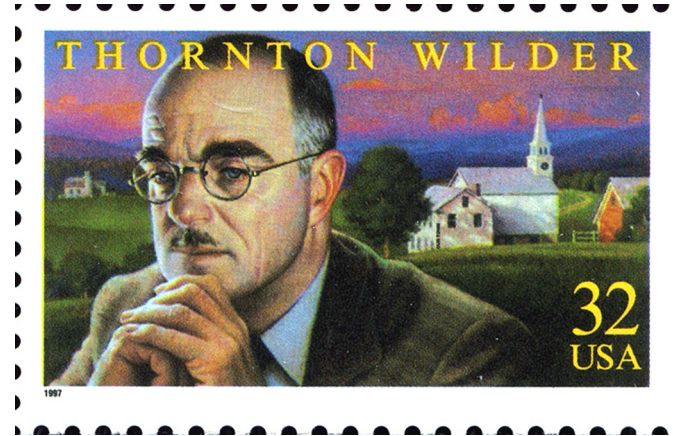


Thornton Wilder

Playwright, novelist (1897 - 1975)



Wilder was born in Madison, Wisconsin, the son of Amos Parker Wilder, a U.S. diplomat, and Isabella Niven Wilder. All of the Wilder children excelled in their pursuits. His older brother Amos was Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, and was also a nationally ranked tennis player who competed at Wimbledon in 1922. His youngest sister, Isabel, was an accomplished writer, his sister Charlotte was a noted poet, and his sister Janet was a zoologist.

Wilder began writing plays while at The Thacher School in Ojai, California and later graduated from Berkeley High School in 1915. After serving in the Coast Guard during World War I, he attended Oberlin College before earning his B.A. at Yale in 1920. He received his M.A. in French from Princeton in 1926.

In 1926, his first novel *The Cabala* was published, followed by *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, which earned him his first Pulitzer Prize in 1928. It sold 240,000 copies that year, placing it atop the bestseller list, and in 1998, it was named one of the 100 best novels of the 20th Century by the editorial board of the American Modern Library. In 1938, he won the Pulitzer Prize for drama for his play *Our Town*, and he won the prize again in 1942 for his play *The Skin of Our Teeth*. His play, *The Matchmaker*, ran on Broadway for 486 performances (1955-57), and was later adapted into the record-breaking musical *Hello, Dolly!* In recent years, Wilder's works have also inspired a growing number of adaptations, among them an opera based on *Our Town* (music by Ned Rorem, libretto by J.D. McCLATCHY) and a dramatized version of his novel *Theophilus North* (by Matthew Burnett).

Wilder taught poetry at Harvard, where he served for a year as the Charles Eliot Norton professor. Though he considered himself a teacher first and a writer second, he continued to write throughout his life. In 1967, he won the National Book Award for his novel *The Eighth Day*. Other honors include the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Gold Medal for Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

He died in Hamden, Connecticut, where he lived for many years with his sister, Isabel. In 2008, the Thornton Wilder Society sponsored the first international conference on his work.