

# This Day in History... March 5, 1892

## Birth of Dean Cornwell

Dean Cornwell was born on March 5, 1892, in Louisville, Kentucky. A prominent illustrator and muralist, his work became familiar to many Americans, appearing in books, advertisements, and World War II posters. He was known as the "Dean of Illustrators."

The son of a civil engineer, Cornwell enjoyed examining his father's detailed industrial drawings when he was a child. Cornwell began his career as a cartoonist for the *Louisville Herald* when he was eighteen years old. In 1911, he moved to Chicago, where he studied at the Art Institute and worked in the art department of another newspaper, the *Chicago Tribune*.

In 1915, Cornwell moved again, this time to New York, where he studied under master-illustrator Harvey Dunn at the Art Students League. He also spent some time in London where he studied mural painting while working as Frank Brangwyn's apprentice. Back in the US, he embarked on a successful career in magazine illustration. His work was in great demand and appeared in *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *The American Magazine*.



Cornwell provided book illustrations for Pearl S. Buck, Edna Ferber, Ernest Hemingway, & others.

Cornwell also provided illustrations for the books of many of the day's leading authors, including Pearl S. Buck, Edna Ferber, and Ernest Hemingway. The popular Lloyd Douglas novels, *The Robe* and *The Big Fisherman*, were filled with Cornwell's images of the Near East.

Cornwell painted several large murals around the country, at the Los Angeles Public Library, the Lincoln Memorial Shrine in Redlands, California, the Eastern Airlines Building in New York City, the Warwick New York Hotel, the New England Telephone building in Boston, the Davidson County Courthouse and Sevier State Office Building in Tennessee, and the Centre William Rappard in Geneva, Switzerland. Under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal Program, the Federal Art Project, Cornwell painted two post office murals in Chapel Hill and Morganton, North Carolina.

Cornwell's name and illustrations became familiar to many Americans through his posters for World War II, his full-page advertisements for large corporations, and his drugstore window placards on "Pioneers in American Medicine." Some of the companies he provided illustrations for include GM, Eastern Airlines, the Pennsylvania Railroad, Paul Jones Whiskey, Aunt Jemima, Seagram's Gin, Woodbury Soap, Palmolive, Coca-Cola, Goodyear, New York Life, and Squibb.

Cornwell was the president of the Society of Illustrators from 1922 to 1926 – and entered its Hall of Fame in 1959. He received medals from the Architectural League



It took Cornwell five years to complete his mural at the LA Public Library. Measuring 40 feet by 40 feet, it illustrated the history of California.

of New York, the Allied Artists of America, and the Society of Illustrators. Cornwell was a member of the National Academy of Design and president of the National Society of Mural Painters from 1953 to 1957. He was also one of very few American artists to have his work displayed by Britain's Royal Academy. Additionally, Cornwell taught at the Art Students League and inspired many young artists.

Dean Cornwell's dynamic illustrations and murals were done mainly in oils, in a monumental, almost rococo style. He frequently worked 17 hour days, seven days a week and produced more than 1,000 illustrations during his career. Fellow illustrator James Montgomery Flagg once said, "Cornwell is the illustrator par excellence – his work is approached by few and overtopped by none... he is a born artist." Cornwell died on December 4, 1960.



This riverboat painting was taken from a February 1953 cover *Cornwell* painted for *True* magazine.



Cornwell painted the General Motors mural for the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

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