

This Day in History... March 8, 1884

Birth of Harvey Dunn

Harvey Thomas Dunn was born on March 8, 1884, near Manchester, South Dakota. Dunn was influenced all his life by the South Dakota prairie where he was born. He once said that he preferred painting pictures of early South Dakota life to any other subject.

Growing up on a homestead farm, Dunn lived in the same county that inspired Laura Ingalls Wilder's stories set on the prairie. Dunn's artistic talent was recognized at an early age. Ada Caldwell, his art instructor at the South Dakota Agricultural College (present-day South Dakota State University) encouraged him to go to Wilmington, Delaware. There, Dunn studied under master illustrator and teacher Howard Pyle in a group known as the Brandywine School.

After two years, Pyle advised Dunn to open his own studio. Dunn opened his studio in Wilmington and quickly found his work in high demand. Not only talented, Dunn was also fast – he once produced 55 paintings in 11 weeks for several different clients. One of his friends recalled that “He literally attacked a canvas, and sometimes I thought he would impale the painting with his brush.”

Artists were in great demand for illustrating stories and advertisements in the many new magazines that were appearing. He illustrated several books magazines such as *Collier's Weekly*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *Scribner's*. Said Dunn, “...I picked the best time since the Civil War to enter upon the activity...” Dunn moved to Leonia, New Jersey, in 1914. The following year, he opened the Leonia School of Illustration with fellow artist Charles S. Chapman.

Dunn was one of Howard Pyle's most successful students.

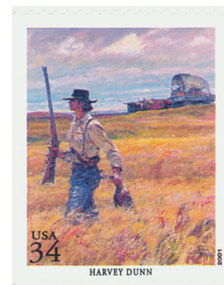
World War I interrupted Dunn's commercial career. He served as an artist with the American Expeditionary Forces, living in the trenches and recording battle scenes in powerful, emotional drawings. While in the field, Dunn developed a device with rollers that enabled him to roll a completed sketch into a box and unwind fresh paper as need. The experience reduced his interest in commercial illustration; he wanted to focus more on his military art. For a time, he planned to convert his battlefield sketches into paintings for the National War College, but his plan was rejected as America quickly demobilized. It was one of Dunn's greatest disappointments. Years later, he was able work on military paintings for covers for the American Legion's monthly magazine.

The war over, Dunn returned to illustrating, painting, and teaching. Grateful to his own teachers, Dunn always regarded teaching as his most important work. Most of his students were at the graduate level or professional illustrators. So, he didn't teach paintings techniques, but instead shared his philosophy on art and life, incorporating spirit and emotion into his work. Dunn was well-liked and respected by his students, though he could be demanding and harsh – he wanted to prepare his students for the competitive nature of the commercial art world. He said that talent wasn't enough, and that “if you ever amount to anything at all, it will be because you are true to that deep desire or ideal which made you seek artistic expression in pictures.”

Though Dunn parted ways with Chapman and closed their school, he still felt an urgency to continue teaching – at the Grand Central School of Art, the Pratt institute, and the Art Students League.

Over the years, he was a major inspiration to many rising artists. Of the importance of teaching, he said, “Art schools teach complexities, while I teach simplicities. The only purpose in my being here is to get [students] to think pictorially.”

Dunn was made a member of the National Academy of Design and was admitted to the Society of illustrators Hall of Fame. He died on October 29, 1952, from cancer. An elementary school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, was named in his honor.



Pictures Dunn's prairie scene, Something for Supper



Dunn's favorite paintings were those inspired by his childhood on the South Dakota prairie.



This stamp image was based on one of Dunn's front-line sketches.



Dean Cornwell was one of Dunn's students.

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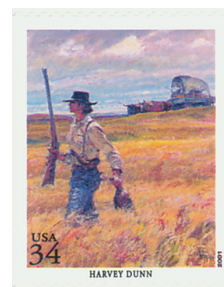


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