

This Day in History... September 25, 1897

Birth of William Faulkner

Celebrated American author William Faulkner was born on September 25, 1897, in New Albany, Mississippi. Known for using a wide range of styles, Faulkner explored America's geography, history, economy, and social and moral life in his writing.

Faulkner's family moved to Ripley, Mississippi when he was one and then settled in Oxford, Mississippi when he was five. His mother and grandmother who loved to read largely influenced Faulkner. They taught him to read before he entered school.

Faulkner was a bright child, skipping the second grade and performing well in third and fourth. However, he began to lose interest in school and preferred to study the history of Mississippi on his own. He never ended up graduating from high school. He also liked listening to his family stories about the Civil War and his great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner, who was a war hero.

By his late teens, Faulkner realized he wanted to be a writer and attended the University of Mississippi for three semesters. While there, he was named acting postmaster of the university post office. It was a fourth-class post office, and he claimed he was a "fourth-class postmaster." He showed little interest in the work, leaving mailbags and the post office window unopened. Faulkner was more interested in spending time with his friends and traveling. When postal officials learned of his actions, he was fired.

Some of Faulkner's poems were published in school magazines during his time at the university. He attempted to enlist in the US Army during World War I, but was ineligible due to his height and instead enlisted as a reservist with the British Army in Toronto.



Faulkner enjoyed studying Mississippi history and many of his stories were set there.

For most of his early life, Faulkner largely focused on poetry. In the 1920s, he wrote his first novels, *Soldiers' Pay* and *Mosquitoes*. In 1927, he wrote *Flags in the Dust*, the first of several novels to be set in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County. The novel was heavily influenced by his life in Mississippi and he believed it was his best work to date. However, his publisher rejected it. Though he was disappointed, he allowed his literary agent to edit the novel, which was then published as *Sartoris* in 1929.

Following the initial rejection of *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner began working on *The Sound and the Fury*. He decided he didn't care what the publishers thought and this novel was much more experimental. Faulkner didn't allow them to edit it all, not even the punctuation. He followed that with *As I Lay Dying* and *Sanctuary*. To help make ends meet, he sent stories to national magazines for publication. And though he didn't watch many movies, he also found work as a Hollywood screenwriter from the 1930s to 1950s.

Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954 for "his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel." He donated part of his winnings "to establish a fund to support and encourage new fiction writers," which resulted in the creation of the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. He also won Pulitzer Prizes in 1955 for *A Fable* and in 1963 for *The Reivers*.

Faulkner suffered a major injury after falling off his horse in June 1962. He then suffered a heart attack and died on July 6, 1962.



Faulkner was the sixth honoree in the Literary Arts Series.

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