

This Day in History... November 8, 1900

Birth of Margaret Mitchell

On November 8, 1900, future novelist Margaret Munnerlyn Mitchell was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Decades later, she would capture the world's imagination with her sweeping Civil War epic *Gone With the Wind*.

Mitchell was born into a wealthy and prominent Georgia family. When she was three, her dress caught on fire on an iron grate. After this, her mother dressed her in boys clothes and she was nicknamed Jimmy until she was 14.

Mitchell's older relatives, which included several former Confederate soldiers, filled her childhood with first-hand accounts of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Although the tales were rich in historical detail, Mitchell was ten years old before she learned that the Confederacy had lost the war. These details – and many elements of Mitchell's personal life – would be incorporated into her blockbuster novel, *Gone With The Wind*.

Mitchell was an avid reader as a child and quickly became a storyteller in her own right. She wrote stories about animals, fairy tales, and eventually adventure stories. Mitchell even designed covers for her stories and included drawings to go along with them. When she was 11, Mitchell named her publishing operation, "Urchin Publishing Co." Over time, the young Mitchell also wrote stories of romance and honor as well as stories set in foreign locations.



From the Great Americans Series



Stamp from the Celebrate the Century Series

As a teenager, Mitchell attended a private girls school where she was very active in the drama club. She played the male characters in a few Shakespeare plays and also wrote and performed in her own plays. Mitchell also joined the school's literary club and had two stories published in the yearbook. Her English teacher recognized her writing talent and encouraged her to continue to work at it.

Mitchell's mother was a vocal suffragist and president of the Atlanta Woman's Suffrage League. She even took Margaret to suffrage rallies led by Carrie Chapman Catt. Reminiscent of her character Scarlett O'Hara's life, Mitchell lost her mother in the great influenza pandemic of 1918. Mitchell left Smith College after a year, and returned home to run her father's household.

In 1922, Mitchell briefly married bootlegger Red Upshaw. Some film buffs claim Upshaw was the model for Rhett Butler while others believe it was Mitchell's famous cousin, John "Doc" Holliday. Mitchell later married John Marsh, a former suitor who had been the best man at her first wedding.

During her first marriage, Mitchell started writing articles for *The Atlanta Journal Sunday Magazine*. She had no prior journalism experience and got no encouragement from her family. Her stories were vivid and captivating. She only worked for the paper for about four years, quitting after she suffered an ankle injury that didn't heal properly. Overall, she wrote 129 feature articles, 85 news stories, and a number of book reviews.

While at home recuperating from her injured ankle, Mitchell had initially tasked her husband with bringing her home large numbers of books from the library. Eventually he said, "can't you write a book instead of reading thousands of them?" This led her to begin working on her Civil War-era novel, *Gone With the Wind*. Chapters of the book were written out of sequence over a period of years and hidden in envelopes under beds, tables, and in closets.



From the Classic Films Set



Issued for the 50th anniversary of the American Red Cross.

Although Mitchell described her work as "lousy," she received a record \$50,000 for the film rights and the movie received a record-breaking number of Academy Awards. *Gone With the Wind* was the only novel Mitchell published during her lifetime and it was awarded the National Book Award for Most Distinguished Novel of 1936. She was also awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1937. *Gone With the Wind* is one of the most widely read novels in history. It has been translated into 27 languages and published in 327 countries.

During World War II, Mitchell volunteered with the Red Cross and raised money selling war bonds. She also helped sew hospital gowns and patch uniforms. Mitchell spent a good deal of time writing heartfelt letters to soldiers serving overseas. Additionally, Mitchell sponsored two light cruisers during the war, both of which were named the USS *Atlanta*.

In 1949, Mitchell was struck by a speeding drunk driver and died five days later, on August 16. Several of her writings were later published after her death, including a novella called *Lost Laysen*.

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