



# THORNTON NIVEN WILDER

## CHRONOLOGY

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1897	Born in Madison, Wisconsin (April 17)
1906	Moves to Hong Kong (May) & to Berkeley, California (October)
1906-10	Attends Emerson Public School in Berkeley
1910-11	Attends China Inland Mission School, Chefoo, China (one year)
1912-13	Attends Thacher School, Ojai, California. <i>The Russian Princess</i> , Wilder's first play known to be produced, is performed by Thacher students
1915	Graduates from Berkeley High School; active in school dramatics
1915-17	Attends Oberlin College; publishes regularly
1920	Receives B.A. from Yale College (with brief service in 1918 with U.S. Army in 1918); many publications
1920-21	Attends American Academy in Rome as special student
1920s	Teaches at Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, New Jersey 1924 ('21-'25, and '27-'28)
1924	First visit to the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire
1926	Receives M.A. degree in French, Princeton University <i>The Trumpet Shall Sound</i> produced in New York Off-Broadway Laboratory Theatre <i>The Cabala</i> (first novel)
1927	Second Novel: <i>The Bridge of San Luis Rey</i> (Pulitzer Prize)
1928	<i>The Angel That Troubled The Waters</i> (first published collection of drama—playlets)
1930s	Part-time teacher, University of Chicago (comparative literature and composition); lectures across the country; first visit to Hollywood (1934); extensive foreign travel.
1930	<i>The Woman of Andros</i> (novel)
1931	<i>The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays</i> (six full one-act plays)
1932	<i>Lucrece</i> (translation of André Obey's <i>Le Viol de Lucrece</i> ) opens on Broadway starring Katharine Cornell
1935	<i>Heaven's My Destination</i> (novel)
1937	Adaptation of Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> for Broadway with Ruth Gordon (Broadway record for this play until 1999)
1938	<i>Our Town</i> opens on Broadway (Pulitzer Prize); Performs role of The Stage Manager for two weeks
1942	<i>The Skin of Our Teeth</i> opens on Broadway (Pulitzer Prize) Writes screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's <i>The Shadow of a Doubt</i>
1942-45	Military service with Army Air Force Intelligence in North Africa and Italy
1948	<i>The Ides of March</i> (novel) Performs his plays in summer stock <i>The Victors</i> off-Broadway (translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's <i>Morts Sans Sépulture</i> )
1949	Major role in Goethe Convocation in Aspen; Lectures widely abroad.
1951-52	Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard
1952	Gold Medal for Fiction, American Academy of Arts and Letters
1953	On cover of <i>Time</i> Magazine (January 12)
1955	<i>The Matchmaker</i> opens on Broadway with Ruth Gordon (revision of the 1938 <i>The Merchant of Yonkers</i> )
1955	<i>The Alcestiad</i> produced at Edinburgh Festival (as <i>A Life in the Sun</i> ) with Irene Worth
1957	Awarded German Booksellers Peace Prize, first American to receive this award
1961	Opera version of <i>The Long Christmas Dinner</i> (music by Paul Hindemith, libretto by Wilder) premieres in Mannheim, Germany, December 20, 1961
1962	Plays for Bleeker Street ( <i>Someone from Assisi</i> , <i>Infancy</i> , and <i>Childhood</i> ) performed at Circle in the Square Theater in New York City Operatic version of <i>The Alcestiad</i> (music by Louise Talma, libretto by Wilder) premieres in Frankfurt, Germany, February 28, 1962
1963	Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom
1964	<i>Hello, Dolly!</i> Opens on Broadway with Carol Channing
1965	Awarded National Book Committee's Medal for Literature
1967	<i>The Eighth Day</i> (novel); receives National Book Award for Fiction
1973	<i>Theophilus North</i> (novel)
1975	Dies in sleep in Hamden, Connecticut (December 7)

## About Thornton Niven Wilder

Born in Madison, Wisconsin, and educated at Yale and Princeton, Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) was an accomplished novelist and playwright whose works explore the connection between the commonplace and the cosmic dimensions of human experience. *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the second of his seven novels, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1928, and his next-to-last novel, *The Eighth Day* received the National Book Award (1968). Two of his four major plays garnered Pulitzer Prizes, *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1943). His play *The Matchmaker* ran on Broadway for 486 performances (1955-1957), Wilder's Broadway record, and was later adapted into the record-breaking musical *Hello, Dolly!* Wilder also enjoyed enormous success with many other forms of the written and spoken word, among them acting, teaching and lecturing, as well as writing translations, opera librettos, and films (his screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* remains a classic to this day). Letter writing held a central place in Wilder's life, and since his death, three volumes of his letters have been published. Wilder's many honors include the Gold Medal for Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the National Book Committee's Medal for Literature. On April 17, 1997, the centenary of his birth, the US Postal Service unveiled the Thornton Wilder 32-cent stamp in Hamden, Connecticut, his official address after 1930. He died at his Hamden home on December 7, 1975.

Wilder continues to be read and performed around the world. *Our Town* is performed at least once each day somewhere in this country or abroad, with his other major dramas and shorter plays not far behind. In 2008, *Our Town* and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* were selected as a joint choice for the NEA's "Big Read" Program. 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 dramatized versions of two novels, *Theophilus North* (Matt Burnett) and *Heaven's My Destination* (Lee Blessing). Reflecting the renewed interest in Wilder, the Thornton Wilder Society sponsored the first international conference on Wilder in fall 2008.

## Publications Available in Bookstores Everywhere

### ***The Selected Letters of Thornton Wilder***

HarperCollins. Edited by Robin G. Wilder & Jackson R. Bryer, 2008. Paperback 2009.

### **THE LIBRARY OF AMERICA COLLECTION**

Edited by J.D. McClatchy, with a detailed chronology, notes and selected unpublished material.

***Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays & Writings on Theatre (2007)***

***The Bridge of San Luis Rey and Other Novels 1926-1948 (2009)***

### **HarperCollins 9-volume re-issue of Wilder's novels and major plays**

These publications feature Forewords by noted authors and Afterwords by Tappan Wilder containing a brief history of the work drawing upon extensive unpublished sources.

***The Bridge of San Luis Rey*** Forward by Russell Banks

***The Eighth Day*** Forward by John Updike

***The Ides of March*** Forward by Kurt Vonnegut

***The Skin of Our Teeth*** Forward by Paula Vogel

***The Cabala & The Woman of Andros*** Forward by Penelope Niven

***Heaven's My Destination*** Forward by J.D. McClatchy

***Our Town*** Forward by Donald Margulies

***Theophilus North*** Forward by Christopher Buckley

***Three Plays: Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, Matchmaker*** Forward by John Guare

### **THE COLLECTED SHORT PLAYS OF THORNTON WILDER** published by TCG Press

**Vol. I.** Foreword by John Guare, with five plays published for the first time (1997)

**Vol. II.** Foreword by A.R. Gurney, with full-length play ***The Alcestiad*** (1998)

### **New Acting Editions**

***Thornton Wilder's Playlets: Short, Short Plays for 3-5 Persons*** published by Playscripts, Inc.

*Twenty-two 3-5 minute plays written between 1917 & 1928 and released for the first time in an acting edition in 2009.*

***The Beaux' Stratagem*** published by Samuel French

*Adapted by Thornton Wilder and Ken Ludwig from George Farquhar's late-Restoration comedy begun by Wilder in the '30s & completed by Ludwig in 2006. World premiere: The Shakespeare Theater, Washington, D.C., Nov. 2006.*

### **Forthcoming:**

***Thornton Wilder: A Biography***

By Penelope Niven. HarperCollins, 2011