

This Day in History... September 7, 1860

Happy Birthday Grandma Moses

American folk artist Anna Mary Robertson Moses (popularly known as Grandma Moses) was born on September 7, 1860, in Greenwich, New York.

Moses was the third of ten children born to a farmer. She attended a one-room schoolhouse, which is now the Bennington Museum in Vermont. It hosts the largest collection of her art in the world.

From a young age, Moses enjoyed painting and took art lessons in school. Some of her early works at home were landscape paintings made with lemon and grape juice. She used other interesting natural materials for her art, including grass, flour paste, and sawdust. Her father encouraged her and her siblings to draw, which helped foster her life-long love of art. However, she would have to put her artistic ambitions aside to earn a living.

When she was 12, Moses left home to work for a nearby wealthy family performing chores around their farm. She remained in that field for 15 years, working for several different families cooking, cleaning, and sewing. During this time, she showed an interest in the Currier and Ives prints owned by one of the families. They bought her chalk and wax crayons so she could explore her creative impulse.

At age 27, Moses met Thomas Salmon Moses, who worked on the same farm she did. They got married and moved to Staunton, Virginia, where they continued to work on other people's farms. While there, they had 10 children, five of whom survived infancy. To help increase the family's income, Moses made potato chips and butter to sell.

In 1905, the Moses family moved to Eagle Bridge, New York and started a new farm. Moses never lost her interest in art, continuing to produce creative works in her free time at home. In particular, she enjoyed making embroidered pictures and quilted items for friends and family.

By the time she was 76, Moses developed arthritis, which made embroidery difficult and painful. Her sister then recommended she start painting again. She usually painted with her right hand, but when she experienced pain, she could also paint with her left hand.

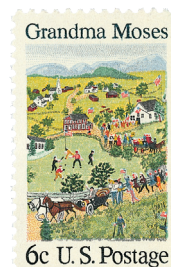
Moses's paintings captured a nostalgic rural life, based on her years of farm life.

Of her work, she said, she would "get an inspiration and start painting; then I'll forget everything, everything except how things used to be and how to paint it so people will know how we used to live." Over the course of three decades, she would produce more than 1,500 paintings.

In 1938, an art collector discovered Moses's paintings in a drug store window. He purchased all they had plus several more from Moses herself, all for between \$3 and \$5 each. The following year, three of her paintings were displayed in the New York Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Contemporary Unknown American Painters*. Two years later, she had her first solo exhibition titled, *What a Farm Wife Painted*. She would hold three exhibitions in three months that year. Her art shows also included her homemade baked goods and preserves, which had won her prizes at the county fair.

Soon, Moses's art was on display in Europe and her paintings were selling for up to \$10,000 each. In the 1950s, her exhibitions broke attendance records and her paintings were being reproduced on greeting cards, tiles, fabrics, and ceramics. They were also used to market coffee, lipstick, cigarettes, and cameras.

Grandma Moses received a number of honors during her lifetime. She received two honorary doctoral degrees and the Women's National Press Club trophy Award for outstanding accomplishment in art. A documentary was made about her life and she wrote an autobiography. In 1960, New York celebrated her 100th birthday as "Grandma Moses Day," and she was featured on the cover of *Life* magazine. She died the following year on December 13, 1961, in Hoosick Falls, New York.



Stamp issued for Senior Citizen's Month. It pictures a painting Moses completed when she was 91 years old.



The schoolhouse she attended is now a museum that holds the largest collection of her art.



Moses and Rockwell were friends. She appeared in his painting Christmas Homecoming.

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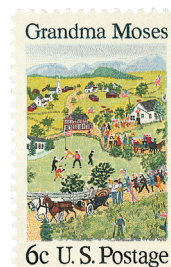
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