

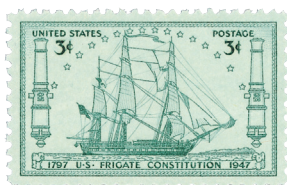
This Day in History... September 15, 1789

Birth of James Fenimore Cooper

Author James Fenimore Cooper was born on September 15, 1789, in Burlington, New Jersey. He was one of the most popular authors of his time, most well-known for his *Leatherstocking Tales*, particularly *The Last of the Mohicans*.

In 1790, Cooper's family moved to Cooperstown, New York, founded by and named after his father, William Cooper. The eleventh of twelve children, Cooper spent his childhood in Cooperstown. He entered Yale University when he was 13, but was expelled during his third year after staging some pranks, including a dangerous one that blew up a door.

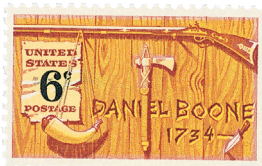
Cooper found a job as a sailor aboard a merchant ship when he was 17. He traveled to England and Spain – the latter would later inspire some events in *Mercedes of Castile*, a novel about Columbus. Cooper then enlisted in the US Navy in 1808, realized a dream he'd had since he was a boy. After serving aboard the USS *Vesuvius*, he was sent to Oswego on Lake Ontario, helping to oversee the building of the USS *Oneida*. He learned a great deal there about shipbuilding, shipyard work, and frontier living. When he wasn't working, he explored the nearby forests and the lakeshore and the Thousand Islands. These experiences would later inform his novel, *The Pathfinder*.



Cooper's time in the Navy influenced several naval writings, including one on the history of the USS Constitution.

In 1823, Cooper published the first of five *Leatherstocking Tales* – *The Pioneers*. The *Leatherstocking Tales* were novels set in the former Iroquois territory of New York during the 1700s and all followed the exploits of frontiersman Natty Bumppo. In 1826 he published the second novel in that series, *The Last of the Mohicans*, which is his most famous work and considered by many to be his masterpiece.

Cooper moved his family to Europe in 1826, hoping to improve his children's education and his health, and to witness European activities firsthand for his writing. He published his third *Leatherstocking Tale*, *The Prairie*, as well as two sea stories, *The Red Rover* and *The Water Witch*. While living in Paris, he befriended Samuel Morse and the Marquis de Lafayette. In the 1830s, Cooper's work took a more political tone in response to the ideas of the European elite and criticisms of America.



The Last of the Mohicans was partially inspired by events from Daniel Boone's life.

Cooper also continued to produce works on naval history, including several biographies of sailors and naval officers, as well as a history of the USS *Constitution*, which was published after his death. Cooper died on September 14, 1851, and several more of his works were published posthumously. Cooper is the namesake of several buildings on State University of New York at Oswego campus, as well as a park in Michigan, and a portion of the New Jersey Turnpike. He's also been inducted into the New York Writers Hall of Fame.

Over the next couple years, Cooper went to Niagara Falls and was then assigned to the USS *Wasp* under Captain James Lawrence. However, he soon found his work to be boring – mostly recruiting work rather than exciting trips to sea. So, he resigned from the Navy in 1810 and got married the following year.

A decade later, Cooper was reading a book with his wife when he felt inspired to try to write his own. His first novel, *Precaution*, was a morality tale and sold relatively well. He followed that a year later with *The Spy*. This 1821 novel was based on stories he'd heard from his friend and neighbor John Jay. *The Spy* was Cooper's first major success, and the first American novel to become a bestseller in America and Europe, going through several printings to meet demand.



Cooper stamp from the Famous Americans Authors Series

Cooper's novel, *The Spy*, was based on Revolutionary-era stories he heard from John Jay.

Cooper moved his family back to America in 1833. He published five volumes about his experiences in Europe and in 1839 published *History of the Navy of the United States of America*. This work was generally well received, though some took issue with his account of the Battle of Lake Erie.

The 1840s were a busy period for Cooper – he wrote half of the 32 novels of his career during that period, including his final two *Leatherstocking Tales* – *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer*. Cooper



Chaney played Chingachgook in *Hawkeye* and *The Last of the Mohicans*.

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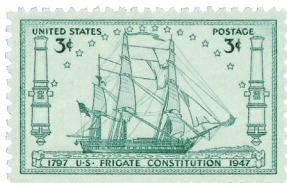
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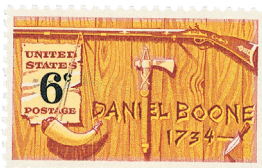
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