

**The Abridged Version of the  
History of the US Copyright Law**  
*compiled by Neil Gillis, supplemented by David Hirshland*

May 2, 1783

Congress recommends that each of the 13 states create legislation to protect authors and publishers of books. This was due to pressure applied by Noah Webster for protection of his new book the "American Spelling Book."

1787

12 of the 13 states had copyright laws in place using the "Statute of Queen Ann" as the principal guide.

1788

The U.S. Constitution was ratified.

1790

Congress creates the first U.S. copyright act. It details the protection of books, charts and maps created by U.S. citizens and residents. The term of protection is 14 years with a renewal term of 14 years. The following was the procedure required for protection:

- record title prior to publication at the clerks office of the local district court
- a copy of this fact needed to be printed in at least 1 newspaper for 4 weeks
- send a copy of the book, chart or map to the office of the sec. of state within the first 6 months of publication

1831

Via an amendment this year, musical compositions added as protected properties (any musical selection printed in a book prior to this amendment was protected under the old law). In addition, the first term of copyright was extended to 28 years with the renewal term remaining at 14 years.

1897

Congress amends the copyright law to allow copyright owners in musical compositions the right to be paid for public performances of the works.

1909

The 1909 act is a bit more of a formal statement of rights of copyright. The renewal term is extended to 28 years and a \$.02 royalty is mandated for mechanical reproduction of works (at this time it was piano rolls and early disc and cylinder recordings).

1954

The California Copyright Conference is founded in Los Angeles, California.

1955

The Copyright Office is officially funded by the Congress to initiate a study so that the 1909 act can be overhauled.

October 19, 1976

The newly revised copyright law (it only took them 21 years) is enacted. It becomes effective 1/1/78. The main points that were overhauled were:

- term of copyright becomes life of author + 50 years for works created post 12/31/77.
- the 19-year extension is devised to give extended rights to works written prior to 1/1/78.

1988

U.S. passes the Berne Convention Implementation Act which is a prerequisite to officially joining the Berne Convention on March 1, 1989.

1990

U.S. Supreme Court rules in "Stewart v. Abend" that heirs of an author who dies during the initial 28 year period hold a separate renewal right in the renewal term of the copyright.

June 26, 1992

The Copyright Amendments Act of 1992 is passed and signed by President Bush. The most important amendment was that for those pre-1978 works still in their first term, this amendment provided for the automatic renewal of copyright for an additional 47 years without the necessity of filing renewal applications. This amendment is crucial in that it eliminates the possibility of a first term work falling into the public domain by reason of failure of filing the proper renewal registrations during the last year of the first term.

January 27, 1998

Congress passes the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act which extends the length of copyright protection by 20 years.

October 28, 1998

Congress implements the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Copyright Treaty by passing the "Digital Millennium Copyright Act" to cope with the advances in digital technology and its effect on copyright law.

May 10, 2004

The CCC holds its fiftieth anniversary celebration in L.A.