

2g. A Timeplan of *Our Town*

Immediate Circumstances in *Our Town*

Timeplan

Featuring selected historical events and incidents as well as a condensed production history of *Our Town**

10th century CE	The Cotahatchee tribes begin occupying the land which Grover's Corners sits on.
Circa 1622	English colonizers settle in New Hampshire.
Late 17th century CE	English colonizers establish Grover's Corners.
Circa mid-1860s	Mrs. Julia Gibbs is born.
Circa 1871	Howie Newsome is born.
Circa 1885	George Gibbs is born.
Feb 11, 1887	Emily Webb is born.
Circa 1890	Joe Crowell Jr. is born. Wally Webb is born.
Apr 17, 1897	Thornton Wilder is born.
Feb 11, 1899	Emily Webb turns twelve.

* Why include wars, pandemics, and tragedies in a timeplan of *Our Town*? Intrinsic to the play's themes is the guarantee of death and how easily life slips from one's eyes even as they live it. I feel that a reminder of how violence and other destructive forces contribute to this dynamic of life and death proves important when contextualizing *Our Town* for the present day. As the Stage Manager observes, "this is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying." Given how Wilder makes reference to *Our Town* within the play itself, thus making the play a metatheatrical device, a condensed production history of *Our Town* felt necessary to include in this timeplan. To learn more about the production history of *Our Town*, please see the dedicated Production History (item 2c) found earlier in this text.

In Act 3 of *Our Town*, a deceased Emily Webb returns to the day of her twelfth birthday in hopes to understand why the dead do not return to life.

May 7, 1901

Act 1 of *Our Town* occurs.

The Grover's Corners time capsule is laid in the cornerstone of the town's soon-to-be-built bank; it contains a copy of the *New York Times*, the *Grover's Corners Sentinel*, the Bible, the Constitution of the United States, and one or more of William Shakespeare's plays. The Stage Manager also adds a published copy of *Our Town* to the time capsule. The capsule is treated to last one thousand years.

Circa 1903

Emily Webb and George Gibbs confess their love for one another in Mr. Morgan's drugstore (in a flashback in Act 2).

July 7, 1904

Act 2 of *Our Town* occurs.

Emily Webb and George Gibbs marry.

1904-1913

Simon Stimson, the church organist and choir director dies of suicide by hanging.

Mrs. Soames, the town chatterbox dies.

A policeman in Grover's Corners, Constable Warren, dies.

1910-1911

Mrs. Julia Gibbs dies of pneumonia while visiting Rebecca Gibbs and her husband in Canton, Ohio.

1910-1913

Wally Webb dies of a burst appendix while on a Boy Scout camping trip.

Summer 1913

Act 3 of *Our Town* occurs.

Emily Webb dies in childbirth.

- Jun 28, 1914 Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated. One month later, on July 28, Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia, beginning World War I.
- 1917-1919 Joe Crowell Jr., once a paperboy for the Grover's Corners *Sentinel*, dies in combat in France during World War I.
- March 1918 The first cases of the Great Influenza pandemic originate in the United States. Over the next two years, 500 million are infected worldwide, and anywhere from seventeen million to fifty million die.
- Circa 1930 Dr. Frank Gibbs, the town doctor, dies.
- Jul 2, 1935 Thornton Wilder scribbles down the title "M Marries N" in a list of play ideas and concepts. Wilder spends the next two years evolving "M Marries N" into *Our Town*.
- Jan 22, 1938 *Our Town* premieres at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey.
- Feb 4, 1938 *Our Town* opens on Broadway at the Henry Miller Theatre. It runs for 336 performances.
- Sep 1, 1939 Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany invades Poland. Great Britain and France declare war on Germany two days later, beginning World War Two. The resulting conflict causes seventy to eighty-five million deaths, including the genocide of six million European Jews during the Holocaust. The Nazis murder an additional five million non-Jewish victims as well.
- Jan 10, 1944 The first New York revival of *Our Town* opens at New York City Center. It runs for twenty-four performances.
- Nov 27, 1969 The second New York revival of *Our Town* opens at ANTA Theatre. It runs for thirty-six performances.

- Dec 7, 1975 Thornton Wilder dies of a heart attack at his home in Hamden, Connecticut.
- Summer 1981 The first cases of the United States HIV/AIDS epidemic are reported. In decades that follow, over 700,000 die of AIDS related complications—gay and bisexual men receive the highest mortality rates.
- Dec 4, 1988 The third New York revival of *Our Town* opens at Broadway's Lyceum Theatre. It runs for 136 performances.
- Apr 20, 1999 Two shooters massacre thirteen and injure twenty-four at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado; they also attempt to bomb the school. The two shooters then commit suicide.
- Sep 11, 2001 Nineteen Al-Qaeda Terrorists hijack airplanes in the United States and crash two into the World Trade Center and one into the Pentagon. A fourth hijacked plane does not reach its intended target and crashes in an empty Pennsylvania field after passengers fought to regain control. 2,977 innocent victims die on September 11, and thousands more suffer from debilitating if not fatal diseases related to the attacks in the following years.
- Dec 4, 2002 The fourth New York revival of *Our Town* opens at Broadway's Booth Theatre. It runs for fifty-nine performances.
- Feb 26, 2009 An off-Broadway revival of *Our Town* opens at the Barrow Street Theatre. It runs for 644 performances, making it the longest running production in the play's history.
- Dec 14, 2012 A shooter massacres twenty-six and injures two at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. The shooter also murders his mother and later commits suicide.
- Oct 26, 2017 A multilingual production of *Our Town* opens at the Colony Theatre in Miami, Florida.

- January 2020 The first cases of the COVID-19 pandemic reach the United States. Over the next four years (and counting), 700 million are infected worldwide, and anywhere from seven million to thirty-five million die.
- Oct 7, 2023 Hamas militant groups from Palestine launch a rocket attack on Israel, killing 1,139. In the following weeks, Israel responds with a greater bombardment of the Gaza Strip, culminating in a full-out ground invasion on October 27. The subsequent months of invasion and bloodshed lead to over 34,000 Palestinian deaths and over 260 Israeli deaths (as of April 2024) and displaces over two million inhabitants in what many regard as a genocide of Palestine.
- Oct 10, 2024 The fifth New York revival of *Our Town* opens at Broadway's Ethel Barrymore Theatre.
- Nov 5, 2024 The sixtieth presidential election in the United States occurs. Pressing issues in the election are abortion, border security, LGBTQ rights, and the criminal trials of Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.
- May 7, 2901 The Grover's Corners time capsule is opened.

Immediate Circumstances

Act 1 - May 7th, 1901

- It is dawn—just before seven o'clock.
- Dr. Gibbs was assisting a woman in the Goruslawski family in Polish Town give birth to twins since 1:30am.
- Farmers like Howie Newsome have already been up milking and preparing for the day.
- Joe Crowell Jr. is getting ready to start delivering the Grover's Corners *Sentinel*.
- Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb have been getting ready for the day before coming down to prepare breakfast for their respective families.

- Before this day, George has been acting irresponsibly around the Gibbs household and has ignored chores like chopping wood.
- Mrs. Webb has been recovering from a cold that still affects her ability to sing in tune at choir practice at the Congregational church.
- Mrs. Gibbs was visited by a “second-furniture [man] from Boston” the previous Friday.

Act 2 - July 7th, 1904

- It was raining earlier in the day and/or overnight.
- Emily and George have fallen in love (as seen in the flashback to Mr. Morgan’s drugstore in Act 2) and are set to be married.
- Rebecca has been crying all morning while preparing for the wedding.

Act 3 - Summer 1913

- Emily and George settled in Uncle Luke’s farm after their marriage.
- Emily and George had one child, who is four
- Mrs. Gibbs has died; she died between 1910-1911 of pneumonia while visiting Rebecca Gibbs and her husband in Canton, Ohio.
- Wally Webb has died; he died between 1910-1913 of a burst appendix while on a Boy Scout camping trip to Crawford Notch, New Hampshire.
- Simon Stimson has died; he died of suicide by hanging.
- Mrs. Soames has died between 1904-1913.
- Constable Warren has died between 1904-1913.
- Emily has died; she died in childbirth for her second child that summer. It is not revealed whether the second child survived.
- Sam Craig, Emily’s cousin, traveled to Grover’s Corners from Buffalo, New York for Emily’s Funeral.
- Joe Stoddard has been preparing Emily’s grave.