

Word Cross Puzzle Morphs to Crossword Success

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Arthur Wynne, creator of the crossword puzzle, was trying to fill a blank space in his newspaper on a cold evening in December 1913. The British-born employee of the *New York World* created a game for readers after his editor told him to figure out something to fill the page in the Sunday “Fun” section that appeared on December 21, 1913.



As a child in Liverpool, Wynne played a word game called **Magic Square**. Building on that experience, he drew a diamond containing a grid with numbered squares to be filled in by guessing words from similarly numbered clues.

The readers loved it, but the editorial staff considered it a passing fancy, and the *New York Times* went so far as to label the puzzles a waste of time. Although Wynne urged his employers to copyright the puzzles, they declined to do so. After eight years of guiding the paper’s crossword puzzle, both creating new puzzles and editing those submitted by readers, Wynne moved on. He never made any money from his crossword puzzle.

In a dozen years, crossword puzzles were more popular than ever. A Brooklyn resident named Henry Harrison addressed a letter to the editor in the April 10, 1925, edition of the *New York Times*. His missive quoted a statistics report saying that in the last fiscal year, 589 husbands left their wives because the women refused to assist the men with a crossword puzzle and that more than 120 children were lost because their mothers were “engrossed in their cross-word contraptions.”

Ambrose Hines, 100-year-old with crossword puzzle, January 22, 1925.

After Wynne left the *World*, the new crossword editor was Margaret Petherbridge, soon to be **Margaret P. Farrar**. Although at first uninterested in the puzzles, Farrar eventually standardized the puzzle, including stressing the use of common English words and limiting the use of dark blank spaces. With the increasing popularity of the puzzles, two enterprising would-be publishers named Dick Simon and Max Schuster in 1924 decided to publish a compilation of puzzles put together by Farrar and two other colleagues. This volume, which was accompanied by a pencil, promptly sold **400,000** copies, thus launching the publishing house of **Simon and Schuster**. In short order, they filed for copyright protection. Their crossword puzzle series “continues to be the longest running uninterrupted series in American publishing annals,” according to the **New York Times**. Margaret Farrar edited the Simon and Schuster crossword series for 60 years, becoming the doyenne of the crossword. Simon and Schuster is still today the preeminent publisher of crossword puzzle books in the United States.

While early crossword puzzles were developed by individuals using their word and design acumen, nowadays crossword puzzles, as well as number puzzles, can be machine-generated. To register a crossword puzzle, it must show “human authorship,” said **TED HIRAKAWA**, Literary Division chief, although compilations of machine-generated puzzles might be copyrightable if there is authorship in selecting and creating the clues.

Copyright in crossword puzzles contributed to the creation of a publishing business, the growth of the American publishing industry, individual careers, and amusement for many people. A casual keyword search on “crossword” in the online copyright catalog reveals 3,251 entries, a number that seems to indicate that a whole lot of business is going on, including that being conducted by the initial naysayer the *New York Times*, which filed for copyright in 2014 on a book of easy **crossword puzzles**. ©