

Copyright Lore

UCC Finally Protected American Authors Abroad

■ *Judith Nierman*

When President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Universal Copyright Convention (UCC) on Nov. 5, 1954, his pen strokes brought the United States into closer alignment with the world copyright community.

Prior to 1891, foreign works had no copyright protection in the United States, and piracy of foreign works in the United States and of U.S. works abroad was rampant. After President Harrison signed the Chace International Copyright Act of 1891, foreign authors could claim copyright protection in the United States only if their works were typeset, printed, and bound in this country. Much of the rest of the world adhered to the Berne Convention, which provided that signatory countries grant the same copyright protection to foreign as to domestic authors. But the United States did not, and as a result, U.S. works usually lacked protection abroad.

At a Senate hearing on April 8, 1954, luminaries such as poet Carl Sandburg and *The Caine Mutiny* author Herman Wouk, in addition to Register of Copyrights Arthur Fisher, urged Congress to ratify the UCC. Wouk spoke of the United States as an exporter of culture, and Sandburg saw the spread of U.S. literary works abroad in a diplomatic light, saying that it would help those in other countries understand the United States and would gain friends abroad for this country.

The day following the White House signing, the *New York Times* reported that literary and publishing figures as well as members of Congress were present when the President signed the new international copyright agreement. An image in the Copyright Office photo archive records the jovial group, fedoras in hand, posing outside the White House. Those present at the signing included (*left to right*) John Hersey; Herman Wouk; Edward A. Sargoy; Austin C. Keough, Paramount Pictures; Ben H. Brown, Jr., acting assistant Secretary of State; Rex Stout, president, Authors League; Alwyn V. Freeman, consultant, Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Phillips Temple, ALA; Robert W. Frase, ABPC; Waldo Leland, director emeritus, American Council of Learned Societies; Sydney M. Kaye, BMI; Roger C. Dixon, chief, Office of Economic Defense and Trade Policy, Department of State; Dan Lacy, managing director, ABPC; Herman Finkelstein, ASCAP; Charles Tobias, president, Songwriters Protective Association; Maj. Gen. Milton G. Baker, superintendent, Valley Forge Military Academy; Sidney Satenstein, past president, BMI; Max McCullough, UNESCO Relations, Department of State; Samuel W. Tannenbaum; Deems Taylor; Howard Hanson, president, Eastman School of Music; Carl Haverlin, president, BMI; John Schulman; Vincent Wasilewski; Barclay Acheson; Thorsten V. Kalijarvi, deputy assistant Secretary of State; Carl F. Oeschle, deputy assistant secretary for domestic affairs, Department of Commerce; Marshal M. Smith, deputy assistant secretary for international affairs, Department of Commerce; James Watt; Arthur Fisher, Register of Copyrights; Frederic G. Melcher; Representative Kenneth B. Keating, New York; Douglas M. Black, chairman, National Committee for the UCC; and Verner W. Clapp, Library of Congress. ©

