



E. C. Segar

December 8, 1894 - October 13, 1938

Santa Monica, California

Elzie Crisler Segar, the cartoonist who signed his work with a little drawing of a cigar and who introduced the world to Popeye, died in Santa Monica, California, on October 13, 1938, after a long illness. He was forty-three.

He was born on December 8, 1894, in Chester, Illinois, a small town near the Mississippi River, the son of Amzi Andrews Segar, a handyman, and Erma Crisler Segar. As a young man he helped his father paint houses and hang wallpaper, played drums for silent films and vaudeville acts at the local theater, and became the projectionist at the Chester Opera House. At eighteen he decided to be a cartoonist and enrolled in a correspondence course from W. L. Evans of Cleveland. He said he "lit up the oil lamps about midnight and worked on the course until 3 a.m." He told The Literary Digest that his name was pronounced "SEE-gar."

In Chicago he met Richard F. Outcault, creator of Buster Brown, who introduced him at the Chicago Herald. His first strip, Charlie Chaplin's Comic Capers, ran there beginning March 12, 1916. In 1918 he moved to the Chicago Evening American, married Myrtle Johnson, and drew Looping the Loop. The next year he was sent to King Features Syndicate in New York, and Thimble Theatre made its debut in the New York Journal on December 19, 1919, starring Olive Oyl, her brother Castor Oyl and Ham Gravy.

For almost a decade the strip got along without its most famous character. Then, on January 17, 1929, Castor needed a sailor to take his ship to Dice Island and hired a weatherbeaten man on the docks. Asked whether he was a sailor, Popeye answered, "'Ja think I'm a cowboy?" Segar meant him as a one-time character, but so many readers wrote in asking for him that Popeye joined the cast for good that August. Segar went on to create J. Wellington Wimpy, Eugene the Jeep and the Sea Hag.

By 1938 Thimble Theatre ran in about five hundred newspapers, Fleischer Studios had been turning Popeye into animated cartoons since 1933, and King Features was paying Segar \$100,000 a year. He died of liver disease. Charles M. Schulz later called Popeye "a perfect comic strip," and in 1971 the National Cartoonists Society established the Elzie Segar Award in his honor.

Services

Died in Santa Monica, CA, October 13, 1938, aged 43. Portrait: Photograph published in the New York Evening Journal, 1928 (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

NN-OBIT-2026-H268

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