U. S. Copyright Then & Now

Pre-1923

Everything published in the US during this time period is in the public domain because copyright has expired on these works.
You do not need the author's permission to use.

Tip
There are various tools that can aid you in determining if a work is in the public domain. Check out:
- Peter Hintle's Copyright Chart
- Copyright Genie
- Copyright Digital Slider

1923-1977

During this time period, formal copyright procedures had to be followed in order to maintain copyright.
Authors needed to register their work, renew their copyright, and use the © symbol.

If authors failed to meet these requirements, their works could be in the public domain.

1978-Now*

As long as it is creative and fixed, a work created during this time period has copyright attached to it.

Copyright in this period generally lasts the life of the author plus 70 years.

Registration with the Copyright Office is not required, but provides certain benefits**

However, the author generally must deposit in-print, published work with the Library of Congress.

*From 1978-1989, notice was still required.

For a more detailed breakdown of the different periods in copyright history, visit https://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ15a.pdf

**So why should you register with the Copyright Office?

- Creates the presumption that someone infringing on the work had notice that the work was under copyright.
- Cannot sue for copyright infringement if the work is not registered.
- Permits owner to collect statutory damages for copyright infringement in court (if registered within 3 months after publication of the work or before infringement).