

L. Frank Baum, whose fanciful children's books ensconced him as the Royal Historian of Oz in the early 1900s, today remains one of the world's most popular children's writers.

Lyman Frank Baum, who did not like his first name, was born 15 May 1856 to Benjamin Ward Baum and Cynthia Stanton Baum in Chittenango, New York. Sickly as a child, Baum grew up an avid reader, and his father's oil fortune allowed him to explore interests in printing, writing, and acting early in life. In 1882, he wrote and acted in a successful musical play, *The Maid of Arran*. During its run, he met Maud Gage, and the couple married.

Baum joined his family's axle lubricant business in Syracuse, New York, in 1886. By 1888 the company had been sold, and he moved to Aberdeen, Dakota Territory, where he owned a novelty store called Baum's Bazaar and a weekly newspaper, the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. With the demise of the newspaper in 1891, Baum moved his family to Chicago, where he worked as a traveling salesman for a china company. In 1897, he established the *Show Window*, a magazine for professional window dressers, which he ran until 1902.

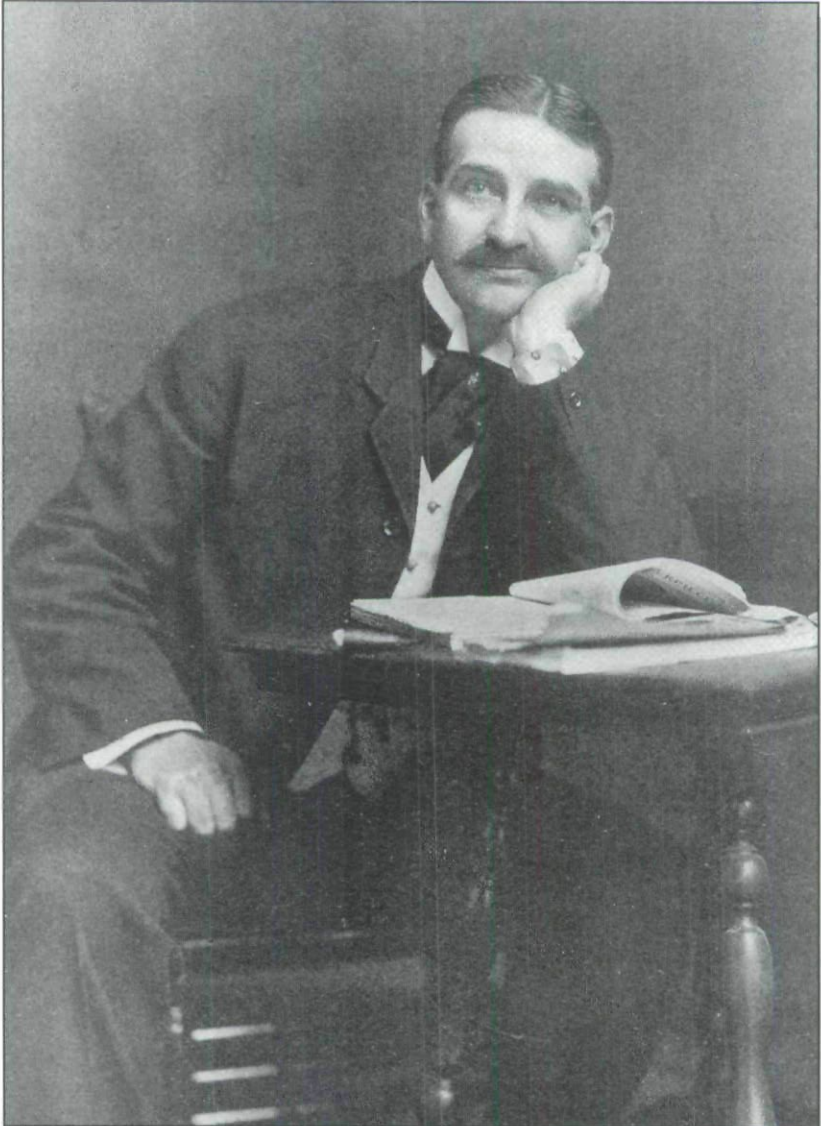
During the 1890s, Baum began writing down the "wonder tales" he had told to entertain his four sons. In 1900, he and illustrator William W. Denslow published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which became one of the fifteen best sellers of the twentieth century. The author followed it with thirteen more Oz books and numerous others written under his own and various pen names. In 1902, he adapted *The Wizard of Oz* as a musical extravaganza. An immediate hit, the show toured the country until 1911 and played eighteen months on Broadway.

Baum had vacationed in southern California, and in 1910 he moved to Hollywood, where his home and gardens became known as "Ozcot." The author had experimented with movies and picture slides in publicizing his Oz books, and in 1914 he formed the Oz Film Manufacturing Company to produce movies based on his stories. Difficulties in distributing films and attracting adult audiences led to sale of the studio to the Universal Film Company.

Baum spent his last years writing stories and answering the hundreds of letters he received from children. He died in Hollywood on 6 May 1919.

by B. Katie Schefers

## Dakota Images



**L. Frank Baum**

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