



The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

L. Frank Baum (1856 -1919)

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The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is the first in the series of fourteen novels recounting the adventures of the now legendary Dorothy Gale and her trio of companions in the magical Land of Oz. The story is well-known and woven into the cultural fabric of America. Swept away from her Kansas farm in a cyclone, she, her dog Toto and their falling house land in Oz, killing the Wicked Witch of the East, the ruler of the Munchkins. She is greeted by Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, who gives her the magical Silver Shoes of the Wicked Witch of the East and directs her to seek the help of the Wizard of Oz in the Emerald City by following the Yellow Brick Road. She meets and frees the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, and the Cowardly Lion, who befriend and accompany her. After a successful series of ordeals and challenges that test her courage and faith she is happily returned to her home through the power of the Silver Shoes.

Written by L. Frank Baum and illustrated by W.W. Denslow, the book was only published when plans were made for a musical stage play at the Grand Opera House in Chicago to promote the novel. The book was an immediate hit upon publication in late 1900, selling out its entire first edition and most of the second edition within a month of publication well before the musical opened in June of 1902 and went on to become a hit on Broadway. The book sold over a million copies by the time the famous movie version *The Wizard of Oz* was released in 1939. Productions and adaptations continue to this day, *Wicked* being the most recent.

L. (Lyman) Frank Baum (May 15, 1856 – May 6, 1919) is best known as the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Born in Chittenango, New York, his early interest in writing was encouraged when his father bought him a printing press; he and his younger brother Harry wrote and published produced several journals. His father established a theatre in 1880 in Richburg, NY, where he wrote, produced and appeared in numerous productions. In 1882 he married Maud Gage, daughter of suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage. After the theatre was destroyed by fire, the couple moved to South Dakota and opened a dry goods store, which went bankrupt. He then worked for newspapers, moving to Chicago in 1891. In 1897 he wrote *Mother Goose in Prose*, with illustrations by the Maxfield Parrish. He followed in 1899 with *Father Goose, his Book*, a collection of nonsense poetry with illustrations by W.W. Denslow, which became the best-selling children's book of the year. Baum and Denslow followed with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900, which was an immediate hit.

With the success of *Oz* Baum moved to Hollywood and produced thirteen additional *Oz* novels with John R. Neill as illustrator. He wrote numerous other works – 55 novels, 83 short stories, over 200 poems, and an unknown number of scripts. His plans for an *Oz* amusement park never came to pass. In 1914 he founded the *Oz* Film Manufacturing Company, but failed to achieve success with films made for a largely non-existent children's audience. Baum was deeply influenced by the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, and hoped to develop a uniquely American mythology. The *Oz* books show his imagination and vision, anticipating such things as television, computers, wireless telephones, and augmented reality. His business instincts for theatre, film, and theme park were equally visionary.