

## L. Frank Baum, Baum's Bazaar, Santa Claus, and Oz

If this were a longer, more scholarly publication, we would include a chapter on Frank Baum's advertising for Baum's Bazaar. One ad tells about a machine that would not have been out of place in Oz:

We have just received . . . a new poetry grinder and having set it up in the midst of our beautiful stock, we turned the crank with the following result:

At Baum's Bazaar you'll find by far  
The finest goods in town  
The cheapest, too, as you'll find true  
If you just step around

The wondrous machine continued to extol the virtues of Baum's merchandise for four verses, but on the fifth, telling about children's toys, it stuck: "...on taking it apart it was found so full of enthusiasm we were obliged to send it to one of the old-fashioned up-town stores to enable it to ooze out."

Certainly Baum had enthusiasm for his toy inventory. Another ad is a listing of all his inventory categories, numbering an astounding two-hundred and sixty-six. Of these, nearly ninety are for children. This ad probably tells us as much about Baum's personality as anything he wrote. As a Santa Claus partisan, Baum did not want any child to feel neglected. Among other things, he lists:

Dressed Dolls	Hobby Horses	Sleds
Wax Dolls	Child's Chairs	Drums
Patent Dolls	High Chairs	Clippers
Bisque Dolls	Blackboards	Toy Trunks
Crying Dolls	Child's Desks	Tool Chests
Talking Dolls	Toy Clocks	Trumpets
Creeping Dolls	Child Swings	Steam Engines
Rubber Dolls	Paper Animals	Steamboats
Express Wagons	Harmonicas	Tin Trains
Doll Carriages	Tin Toys	Nodding
Doll Cradles	Iron Toys	Donkeys
Doll Dishes	Wooden Toys	Toy Villages
Doll High-chairs	China toys	Magnetic Toys
Doll Swings	Rubber Toys	Lead Soldiers
Elephants	Paper toys	Roaming Parrots
Wooly Dogs	Brass Toys	Skin Monkeys
Wooly Sheep	Printing Presses	Skin Horses
Soldier Setts	Steam Engines	Skin Rabbits
Play Stores	Magic Lanterns	Skin Cats
Baby Jumpers	Pop Guns	Pug Dogs
Bell Rattlers	Boys' Guns	Flannel Toys
Bicycles	Boys' Swords	Tin Kitchens

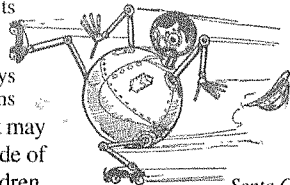
Baum's business plan and his execution of it may have been flawed, but it was flawed on the side of generosity and fantasy and the love of children. Wouldn't you like to shop in a store with such won-

ders today? What child would not take delight in such an inventory in the toy box? And that is what Baum was, and what he continued to be—a child with a great toy box inventory. Each book he wrote became a toy chest, or a toy store, if you will. Sometimes (children like to frighten themselves) he pulled frightening toys out of his box, like witches, fly-

ing monkeys, and hungry tigers; sometimes his toys were amusing, like talking hens, glass kittens, flying so-fas, proving you can take any

old familiar thing and imagine it into a magic toy. Sometimes toys like the Wizard, the lion, and the scarecrow seem bent on getting out of the toy world by expressing themselves philosophically, or by tending to become literary archetypes. But whenever we start taking Baum seriously (as his thoroughly educated Woggle Bug might) he pulls the plug by letting his toys act out of character, and all our pretentious scholarship goes down the drain. Baum is like the child who announces, in the midst of playacting, "This time you be the daddy and I'll be the mommy." Just as easily does the boy Tip become Princess Ozma. These characters are, after all, only toys. That's the fun of it. That's the value, too.

Among the books Baum wrote after the success of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900—and before he wrote any more Oz books—was one called *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*. Santa is one of Baum's real heroes, someone who devotes his life to the happiness of children. Some of the illustrations on this page are from that book, and others are illustrations of "toys" from other Baum books. Though Baum's Bazaar failed, Baum's books succeeded and each became a new "bazaar," a store filled with even more wonderful toys.



Santa Claus illustrations by Mary Cowles Clark; others by John R. Neill

## A Tour of L. Frank Baum's Aberdeen

by Dan Artz



"This must be the Emerald City," said Dorothy.

## How to use this guide ...

### If you are not in Aberdeen:

Though this booklet was designed for those who can visit Aberdeen, it may be read by anyone interested in Baum or Oz, even if they cannot visit, with, I hope, some pleasure. Because each part is supposed to have some stand-alone use, a little repetition must be tolerated.

### For those who can visit:

If your visit is brief, or your interests modest, get in your car and follow the routes described on pages 6 and 7, using the map on the opposite page to find Baum home and business sites. Match map numbers to text item numbers to learn the historical significance of each site. *Keep in mind that the homes listed are private, and not open to the public.*

If you have more time and greater interests, read the brief biography on pages 4 and 5, and maybe the history of early Aberdeen that starts on page 6. These will prepare you to take your own walking tour down Main Street. Use the map on page 3 and the text guide that starts on page 9. You may wish to use your car to visit areas south of 6th Avenue, and resume walking in the Hagerty and Lloyd addition.

Serious Oz and Baum scholars may wish to visit some of the remote sites. The map points the way for those who do.

Or do it your way: follow your private yellow brick road, but have fun on your adventure. That's what Frank would have wanted.



by John R. Neill

## Sources

Primary sources used for this publication include the 1887-1888 Frazier *Aberdeen City Directory*, the 1889-1890 Pettibone *Aberdeen City Directory*, Walter Butler's 1888 Aberdeen city map, the 1912 Sanborn *Insurance Maps of Aberdeen*, the microfilm files of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, the *Aberdeen Daily News*, and the Gage Family Scrapbook, all at Alexander Mitchell Library, which was also the source of the Baum and Gage family pictures. Historical photos are from the Dacotah Prairie Museum. Both of those institutions were helpful beyond the requirements of duty. Sally Roesch Wagner provided me with copies of Gage family notebooks and correspondence.



Mr. H. M. Woggle-Bug, T.E., by John R. Neill

L. Frank Baum's years in Aberdeen are best covered in Nancy Tystad Koupal's edition of *Our Landlady*. Matilda Jewell Gage published "The Dakota Days of L. Frank Baum" in the Baum Bugle. It has been privately reprinted in

*Oz in Aberdeen*, a compilation by Sally Roesch Wagner of Baum papers that also includes very useful work by other writers, including Wagner, Edwin Torrey, Robert Venables, and Michael Patrick Hearn.

The only full-length biography of Baum is *To Please a Child*, by Frank Joslyn Baum and Russell McFall, now out of print. It is not always a reliable source with respect to Baum's time in Aberdeen, but it is helpful in other ways.

Don Artz  
April 24, 1997

### About this publication

This publication was first printed for the Aberdeen/Brown County Landmark Commission. The Commission sponsors guided walking tours of the historical districts in Aberdeen, but because a proper Baum historic tour includes sites too separated for a walking tour, that version of this booklet was offered as an aid to self-guided tours.

The writing, research, design and production (everything but the printing costs) of the first version was donated to the Landmark Commission by the author, who has printed this version privately.

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## Dorothy Gage

On Friday, April 23, 1886, the *Aberdeen News* reported:

T.C. Gage perched himself on a stool in front of the store yesterday morning and grew about two feet in as many minutes. The cause thereof is a girl, which just arrived at his home.

That girl was Matilda, named for her famous suffragette grandmother. Frank Baum, then father of two sons, wrote his brother-in-law a touching congratulatory letter, enviously and facetiously claiming the superiority of male children. Two years later, when the Baums moved to Aberdeen, Frank made fast friends with Matilda, a friendship that lasted all his life.

The Gage's second child, Alice, was born on December 13, 1891. By this time the Baums had moved to Chicago. One wonders how they must have felt if they still subscribed to the

*Aberdeen Weekly News*, which printed these two stories on Friday, December 18, both on the same page. The first:

A handsome baby daughter was born Sunday ... to Mr. and Mrs. T. Clarkson Gage. Mother and child are doing well....

—and, three columns away, the second:

Alice Eliza, infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T.C. Gage, died Tuesday noon ....

Briefly, after T.C. Gage sold his interest in the Beard, Gage and Beard store, the Gages lived in Bloomington, Illinois. There, on July 11, 1898, they had a third daughter, named Dorothy. She died four months later and was buried in Bloomington's Evergreen cemetery. The next year, as Frank Baum wrote *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, he named his heroine Dorothy Gale, a gesture that would have pleased his wife and all the Gage family.



Illustration by W.W. Denslow

## How to Build a City

Continued from page 8

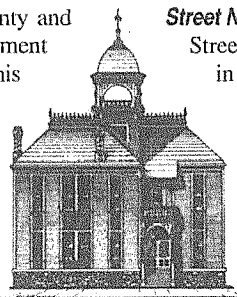
The early speculators apparently justified their confidence in their abilities to make good use of wet real estate. In the first edition of Aberdeen's first newspaper, published on August 4, 1881, editor D. C. Wadsworth marvelled, "Aberdeen now has 64 buildings of all kinds and sizes. Can that be beaten by any town at the advanced age of three weeks?"

Rapid development continued. In 1886, multi-talented city engineer Walter Butler published a fascinating city map. It shows Aberdeen in the center of a circle with nine rail lines extending in all directions, like spokes on a wheel, causing Aberdeen boosters to call the town *The Hub City*.

Though the census of 1890 would determine (then as now, without guaranteed reliability) that Aberdeen's population was 3,182, the 1889-90 Pettibone *City Directory*, published before census numbers were available, had estimated the count at 6,876. An 1890 visitor could discover from

that directory that whatever the population might be, there were about 230 businesses in the city. It had sixty-some retail stores, twelve wholesale houses, twenty hotels, dozens of boarding houses, and four restaurants. It had a flour mill, seven livery stables, three lumber yards, three brick factories, a cracker factory, eleven farm implement dealers, and a plow factory. It had thirty-five lawyers, six banks, and seven newspapers, including one published by L. Frank Baum, who had recently abandoned retailing. It had eight physicians, six drug stores, five music teachers, two artists, two architects, forty-three real estate agents, six meat markets, one fish market, and one map publisher. It had a soda pop factory, a foundry, a steam laundry, an opera house, a band, a greenhouse, an undependable electric company, state-of-the-art telephone service, a notorious artesian well, a library, a race track, a brewery, four cigar factories, and at least nine churches. Such were the signs of confidence in the city Frank Baum had confidently come to in 1888.

to Columbia. The resultant uncertainty and inconvenience made county government interesting during Baum's time. In his *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* he made several sardonic comments about county officials commuting to Columbia. Aberdeen finally won its County Seat designation in the general election of 1890. Again the records were moved to the court house on North Main Street, a building that served until the present court house was completed in 1904.



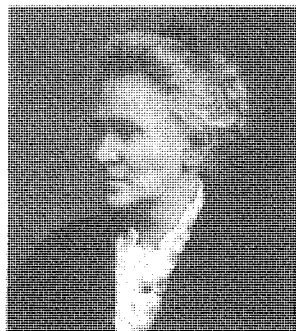
The court house on North Main Street

#### Street Names and Addresses:

Street names in this publication are given in their current form, not as they were in Baum's time. For example, Railroad Avenue was then called Chicago, 6th Avenue was called Nicollet, as it should be again. Washington was called 1st Street, Lincoln Street was 2nd, and today's 1st Street was then called 3rd Street. Until 1909, street numbers, if used at all, were usually 100 higher than they would be in today's system.

#### 35. Take Melgaard Road west to Riverside Cemetery and the Gage family burial plot.

#### Matilda Joslyn Gage and Her Family



Matilda Electa Joslyn  
Born: March 24, 1826  
Died: March 18, 1898

Married: Henry Hill Gage, January 6, 1845

#### Their Children:

Helen Leslie Gage  
Born November 3, 1845  
Died, May 5, 1933

Married: Charles Henry Gage, April 12, 1881

Thomas Clarkson Gage  
Born July 18, 1848  
Died October 19, 1938

Married: Sophie T. Jewell, June 1, 1885

Julia Louise Gage  
Born May 21, 1851  
Died March 7, 1931

Married: James Carpenter, February 9, 1882

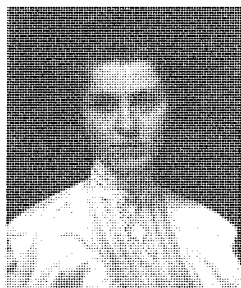
Maud Gage  
Born March 27, 1861  
Died March 6, 1953

Married: L. Frank Baum, November 9, 1882

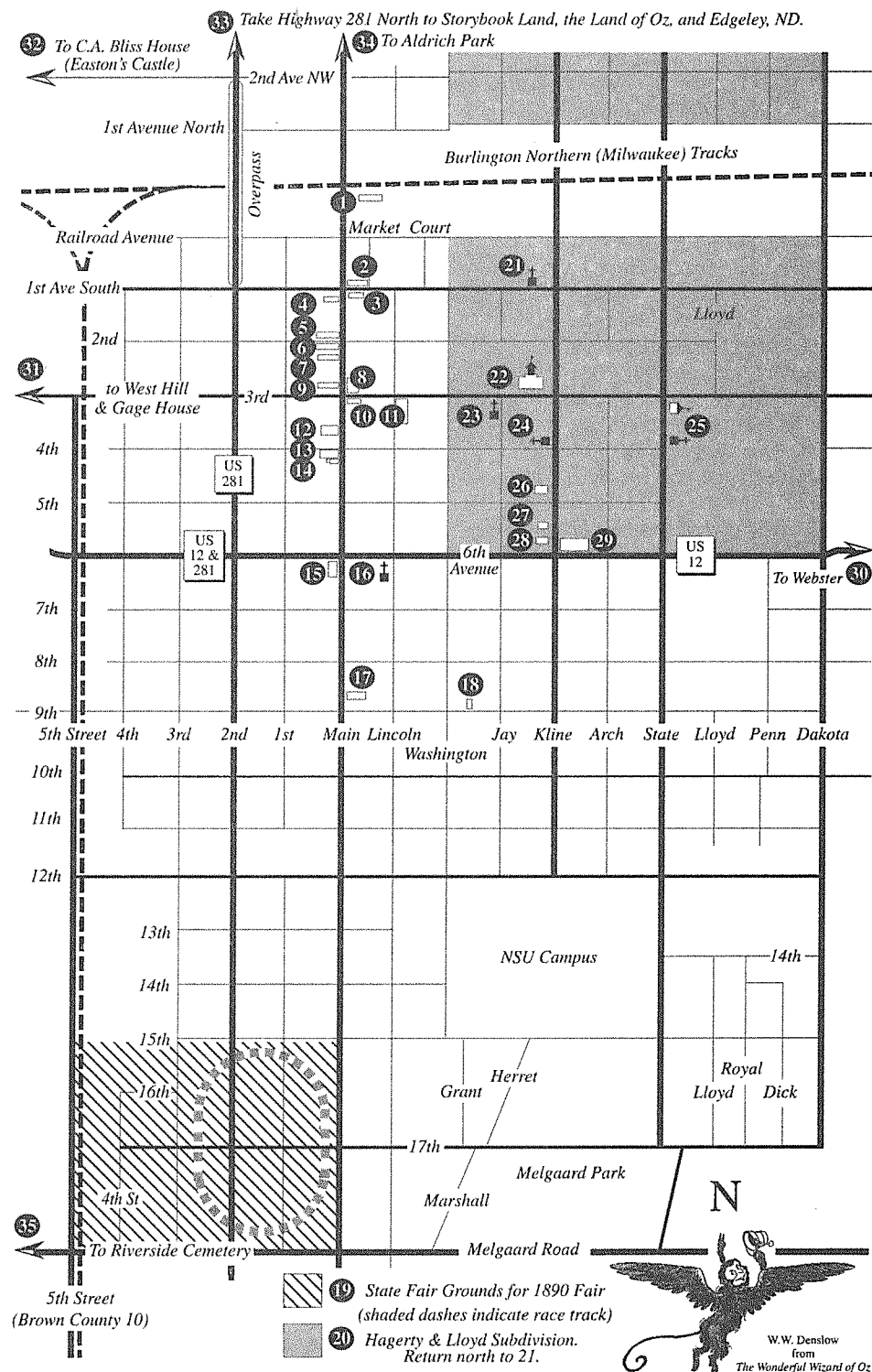
#### The Gage Family Plot at Riverside Cemetery

Helen Leslie Gage  
and her husband,  
Charles Henry Gage,  
(born October 6, 1818,  
died January 17, 1892)  
and their daughter,  
Leslie Gage  
(born 1882,  
died July 8, 1966)

Thomas Clarkson Gage  
and his wife,  
Sophie Jewell Gage  
(born February 4, 1885,  
died December 12, 1945)  
... and their daughter



Matilda Jewell Gage, pictured here as a  
1905 graduate of Aberdeen High School  
(born April 22, 1886,  
died February 1, 1986, age 99)  
... and their second daughter  
Alice Eliza Gage  
(born December 13, 1891,  
died December 15, 1891)



Map of present-day Aberdeen with keys to sites related to the Baum and Gage families in 1888-1891.

# L. Frank Baum's Aberdeen

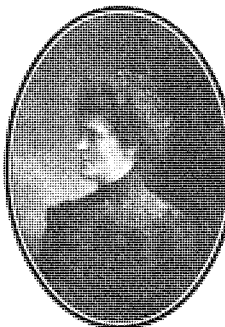
## A brief biography

In 1856, Lyman Frank Baum was born into a wealthy family in Chittenango, near Syracuse, in central New York State. His fond parents pampered him and catered to his whims. As a boy, he was fascinated by printing; his father gave him a press, and Frank published a neighborhood newspaper. When he was a young man, Frank showed a great interest in the theater, so his father bought him one. But Frank had talent, and he achieved some fame as an actor and a playwright. His musical melodrama *Maid of Arran* received good reviews even



L. Frank Baum

when it played in New York City. All that did not impress his prospective mother-in-law, Matilda Joslyn Gage of nearby Fayetteville, New York. As one of the principals of the women's rights movement (with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony), she thought it far more important that her daughter Maud finish her Cornell education than tag after an actor-husband with a gypsy-style life. But in 1882, Maud and Frank did marry, and they did gypsy west as far as Lawrence, Kansas, with a road show of *Maid of Arran*. It was the only time either of them would visit Kansas. Maud wrote to her brother that she did not like Kansas or the West. When Maud became pregnant with their first child, Frank decided to retire from acting and work in the family business in Syracuse. Then a series of disasters depleted the family fortune, and Frank's father and a brother died.



Maud Gage Baum

Meanwhile, out in Dakota Territory, in the new town of Aberdeen, Maud's brother, T. C. Gage, was succeeding nicely in retailing, banking, and property development. Sister Julia had followed him west with her new husband, and they staked a claim near Edgeley, sixty miles north of Aberdeen (map #33). Sister Helen was next, arriving in Aberdeen in 1887. Maud wanted desperately to be near her sisters and brother. She wrote Helen, "I am so lonely."

Concerned with the practicality of Maud's desires, Frank came to Aberdeen in July of 1888,

staying with T.C. Gage for two weeks while exploring the town's business needs. After returning to Syracuse, Frank wrote to T.C. about his plans: "In your country there is an opportunity to be somebody...." He thought the town could use a new opera house and a store that sold "fancy goods."

So it was that in September of 1888, an out-of-work and down-on-his-luck actor named L. Frank Baum brought his wife and their two children to Aberdeen seeking a new start. They lived for a time with Maud's brother, his wife Sophie, and their two-year-old daughter, Matilda, in their new house at 1404 3rd Avenue South West, in T.C.'s new residential development, West Hill (#31).

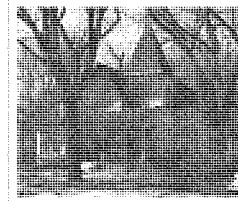
In October, in a little frame building at 406 South Main Street (#12), a building his sister-in-law Helen owned, Frank opened a store he called Baum's Bazaar. He sold candy, ice cream, toys, gadgets, fine china, imported goods, and luxuries of all kinds.

Edwin Torrey, an early Aberdeen newspaper publisher, later wrote of Baum that he "always had a happy faculty for getting on with children." They were attracted to "the tall, slim, patient and tactful man behind the counter."

Frank soon moved his family to a little house at 211 9th Avenue South East (#18). Their third child, Harry Neal Baum, was born there in December, 1889.

In his off-hours Frank participated in the town's amateur theatricals, managed its championship baseball team, and started a bicycle club. Frank had a considerable talent for advertising but struggled to find enough customers for his sophisticated inventory. Hoping to succeed by overwhelming his competitors, he added still more inventory. He was too liberal with credit to his customers, especially since the economy was faltering and his own credit was overextended. He closed his store after the disappointing Christmas season of 1889. Helen then operated it under the name of Gage's Bazaar.

coincidence. It is a coincidence, too, that its tower roof may remind suggestible folks of a witch's hat.



Matilda Gage continued in her father's business; her career spanned forty-five years. She was a member of the American Association of University Women, the Dacotah Prairie Museum, the Brown County Historical Society, and the Territorial Pioneers. The International Wizard of Oz Club presented her with their Memorial Award in 1972. She preserved her father's scrapbooks, an invaluable record of early Aberdeen, and gave them and much else to the Alexander Mitchell Library (29) across the street. Matilda Gage died within months of her 100th birthday. Also see pages 18 and 19.

**29. 519 South Kline Street, Alexander Mitchell Library. It is not from Baum's time, but is a repository of Baum materials. Ask for information.**

## Outlying Areas

**30. Take US Highway 12 50 miles east to Webster, the site of a short-lived Baum store.**

Hoping the Christmas season of 1889 would solve his financial problems at the Bazaar, Frank Baum bought hundreds of items from a Chicago bankruptcy sale, at a time when he probably already had more than enough inventory. He arranged to sell some of his goods in a store in Webster, with less success than he needed. When he closed his Aberdeen Bazaar, inventory from the Webster store was returned to Aberdeen.

**31. The first T.C. Gage house. See page 3.**

**32. 210 2nd Ave. NW, the C.A. Bliss house (Easton's Castle). Extant, it is a private residence.** Bliss was one of Aberdeen's earliest and most energetic entrepreneurs. He operated a bank, a grocery store, a hotel, and a general store while looking after his 1,200 acre farm and promoting various railroad and street-railway ventures. In the society columns



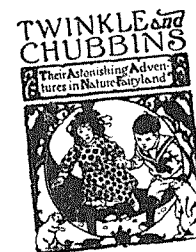
of his *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* Baum frequently noticed the participation of Mr. and Mrs. Bliss in the social events of the young city. This house, without doubt then the grandest in town, was built during Baum's time in Aberdeen. Baum reported on a housewarming party here

in an April 1890 issue. When the Dakota Boom fizzled, so did Bliss's enterprises; he left town and spent later years clerking in a Tacoma, Washington, department store. His house was purchased (for a song, one imagines) by a more conservative money-man, C.F. Easton. Easton was closely associated with T.C. Gage in the home building and loan business. The original Queen Anne Eastlake style of this house was modified by C.F. Easton's son, Russell, and it is now commonly called Easton's Castle.

**33. Take US Highway 281 north to Wylie Park, Storybook Land, The Land of Oz, and to Edgeley, North Dakota.**

**The Land of Oz:** Storybook Land at Wylie Park, just north of Aberdeen on Highway 281, is the site of an L. Frank Baum and Oz commemorative park, called The Land of Oz, under development as this is written.

**Edgeley:** Maud Baum's sister Julia married James Carpenter in 1882. They staked a claim near the future site of Edgeley, North Dakota, sixty miles north of Aberdeen. The Carpenters lived a brutally hard life on their claim, and later: one child died in infancy, and the family would be afflicted with dire poverty, alcoholism, madness, and suicide. Frank and Maud Baum visited the Carpenters on their homestead and felt the misery and bleakness of their lives. Baum scholar Michael Patrick Hearn has said that the Carpenters are models for Uncle Henry and Aunt Em in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and their dismal, gray Dakota world was the model for "Kansas." In his book *Twinkle and Chubbins*, Baum set the scene "on the great western prairies of Dakota" near "a little town called Edgeley, because it is on the edge of civilization."



**34. 300 block North Main Street, site of Aberdeen's first County Court House. Now Aldrich Park.**

Columbia, the first city in Brown County, was still serving as the county seat when Baum came to Aberdeen, even though it had lost that designation to Aberdeen in an 1887 election. After that election, county records had been moved from Columbia to the court house Aberdeen had built on this block in anticipation of victory. Columbia contested the election, and in 1889 the Supreme Court agreed, so the records were trundled back

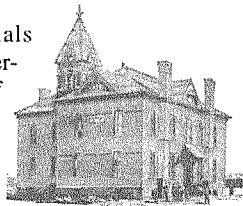


In 1885, Sophie Jewell and Thomas Clarkson Gage exchanged vows in this building in the first church wedding in Aberdeen. They were Episcopalians, and the Episcopal church would not be built until 1887, but they were nevertheless properly married by an Episcopal minister in the Presbyterian Church.

The Presbyterians sponsored almost as many social events as the Episcopalians. Baum seemed to enjoy reporting them. He played the part of Father Time in a Presbyterian holiday celebration in December of 1890.

**22. 315 3rd Avenue SE. Aberdeen High School. Demolished. Its site is now a parking lot east of Central High School.**

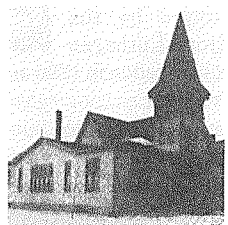
Baum wrote editorials claiming that the Aberdeen superintendent of schools was overpaid at \$1,800 a year. It was a generous salary for the time—Sioux



Falls paid less—but we can hardly know if Baum's charge of incompetence was correct. In response to his criticism, many students wrote—or were induced to write—to other newspapers, saying that he should mind his own business. To Baum they may have seemed as ominous as flying monkeys when they demanded a boycott of his *Saturday Pioneer*. He was deeply hurt, thinking they ought to understand he had only the best interests of the students in mind. It was February, 1891; his health was poor, his newspaper was failing, and his wife was about to give birth again. He needed no more problems to convince him it was time to leave Aberdeen.

**23. 224 3rd Avenue SE. Methodist Episcopal Church. Demolished. Its site is now a parking lot for the Bethlehem Lutheran Church.**

Baum did not write about Methodist functions, though if we were as fanciful as Baum would have us be, we might believe it likely that his Mrs. Bilkins was a member of that congregation. The Methodists were active in mission work, as she was; they were in favor of strict laws requiring keeping the sabbath, as she was—and as Baum decidedly was not. They campaigned for prohibition; so did Baum, but only because he wanted the experiment to be tried and then to

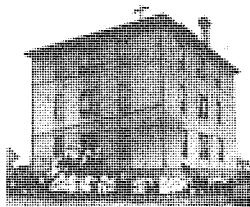


fail. He used Mrs. Bilkins to explain why it would not work. She told how prohibitionists (not pious Methodists, of course) celebrated their victory at the polls by getting drunk, and she poked fun at the Reverend Frank Burdick, Elder of the Methodist Church, for his prohibition stance. The present Methodist Church on Lincoln Street was dedicated in 1908.

**24. 318 South Kline Street, present First Presbyterian Church. Also see item 21, page 15.**

**25. 307 South State Street, Presentation Academy, and 325 South State, Sacred Heart Church. Both were long ago demolished. Their sites are now used by St. Luke's Midland Hospital.**

Baum never mentions the Catholics in the community. Certainly he would have felt their creed was superstitious and outmoded, since he wrote as much of other denominations. He never mentions Father Haire, the energetic, populist pastor who founded Sacred Heart parish, persuaded the nuns to establish a boarding school for girls here,



Presentation Academy

was an effective state legislator and a champion of the first Initiative and Referendum legislation in the nation. But Baum did know him: both had served as delegates to an equal suffrage convention. Perhaps Baum did not know what to make of a presumably superstitious priest who favored more progressive causes than he did, with broader principles and greater intensity.

**26. 416 South Kline Street, the house Frank Hagerty built. Extant, it is now a private residence.**



Frank Hagerty began building this fine home in 1888 but was forced to sell it to satisfy creditors in 1892. Frank Baum was a near neighbor of Hagerty's when he lived at 512 S. Kline Street.

**27. 512 South Kline. Baum residence. See page 6.**

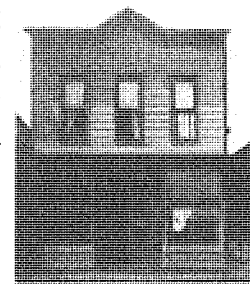
**28. 520 South Kline Street, later home of the Gage family. Extant, it is now a private residence.**

T.C. Gage moved his family from West Hill (31) to this house in 1920. For the Gage family, this was home for the rest of their lives. It was next door to the house the Baums had lived in thirty years earlier (27), but that proximity was only a

Baum bounced back—he was good at bouncing back—as a newspaper editor, beginning publication of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* on January 25, 1890. His wit and imagination made it a lively newspaper, especially with a column he called "Our Landlady," in which his fictional Mrs. Bilkins and her tenants discussed local events and inhabitants. Many incidents, characters, and ideas later used in his *Oz* books can be found in Baum's Aberdeen writings, including a miraculous cyclone, green glasses used to promote optimism, mechanical men, a wizard, and women as soldiers.

In the fall of 1890, the Baums moved to a better house at 511 South Kline Street (#27). Their fourth child, Kenneth Gage Baum, was born there in March, 1891.

These were turbulent times in the Dakotas, and that turbulence is mirrored in the pages of Baum's *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. Prohibition, suffrage, drought, frightful winters, hunger, the economic problems that resulted in the formation of the Populist party—all were covered in Baum's editorials and features. National and regional newspaper publicity about the Ghost Dance religion among the Indians brought unreasoning fears, even panic, to faraway Aberdeen. The image we may have of an always kindly, pacifistic



Baum's Bazaar



Kenneth and Harry Baum

author is likely to be shattered when we learn that after Sitting Bull was killed, and again after the Massacre at Wounded Knee, Baum wrote editorials calling for the annihilation of the Indians.

The Great Dakota Boom had brought thousands west in the previous ten years; now, as it collapsed, Baum's newspaper failed. The entire area was suffering from depression, drought, and a massive out-migration. His worry for his financial failures aggravated by health problems, Baum had reason for personal depression. After a last, lackluster issue of April 4, 1891, broke and dispirited, he left Aberdeen for Chicago. Nine years later he would publish *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a story that tells how imperfect beings, with goodness and persistence and a little magic, can triumph over a hostile environment and the powers of evil. Following the success of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* Baum wrote another thirteen books in the *Oz* series, dozens of other children's books, and produced several *Oz*-based plays and silent movies. After he died in Hollywood, California, in 1919, other authors wrote many more *Oz* books. The MGM movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, starring Judy Garland, was made in 1939.

Want more information on Baum and his times? See the Sources guide on the inside front cover.

## Baum's Mrs. Bilkins, an Aberdeen Landlady

When, in the first issue of L. Frank Baum's *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, residents were treated to a satirical column set in a fictional boarding house, they could easily recognize the scene: because of housing shortages, and for economic reasons, a large portion of Aberdeen's citizens lived in boarding houses. Baum wrote forty-eight "Our Landlady" columns. His landlady is plump and florid-faced, an aging, bewigged widow named Sairy Ann Bilkins, a Mrs. Malaprop with a brogue and an attitude. Around the dinner table and in the kitchen she and her boarders discussed the Aberdeen news of the day while Baum worked the names of as many local citizens into their

conversation as he could. It was a formula that often produced delightful results, much like a TV sitcom. She sometimes serves as Baum's voice, and sometimes as a foil for his views; almost always, she amuses and instructs. From her we learn about early Aberdeen, the world at the end of the 19th century, L. Frank Baum—and something about *Oz*, too. All these columns have been reprinted in a book called *Our Landlady*, edited by Nancy Tystad Koupal. It is available at book stores, the Dacotah Prairie Museum, and the Alexander Mitchell Library. Koupal's notes and comments help us make our way through the confusing social maze of early Aberdeen.

## Start a driving tour with Baum family homes...

### 31. 1404 3rd Avenue South West: the T. C. Gage house, now a private residence.

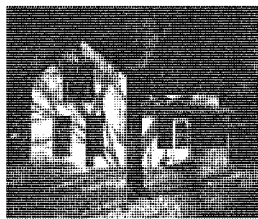


When Frank Baum was considering moving to Aberdeen in June of 1888, he took the train west from Syracuse and made a reconnaissance of the town, staying with his brother-in-law, T.C. Gage, and T.C.'s wife, Sophie Jewell Gage, in their almost-new home. Their daughter Matilda was two years old and a favorite of Frank's. Gage and his business partners, Henry and Frank Beard, were then promoting their residential development, West Hill, as Aberdeen's first suburb. It was said to be thirty feet higher than frequently-flooded Main Street. When Frank Baum moved his family to Aberdeen in September of 1888 they lived for a time in this house with the Gage family.

Thomas Clarkson Gage was the eldest child and only son of Matilda Joslyn Gage of Fayetteville, New York. Mrs. Gage was the coauthor (with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony) of the three-volume work, *The History of Woman Suffrage*. She would later write *Woman, Church and State*, a courageous history of the ways in which men have used religion to subjugate women. Mrs. Gage stayed with her son's family every winter. Susan B. Anthony was also a guest in the Gage house when she came to Aberdeen. The Gage family's commitment to women's suffrage may have influenced Baum's views; he campaigned for suffrage repeatedly in his *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. Or perhaps such beliefs had been ingrained in Frank's heart earlier; but as race relations in America grew steadily worse, he sometimes seemed oblivious to the sorrows of minorities.

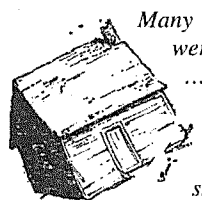
### 18. 211 9th Avenue South East. It is now a private residence.

Good houses were hard to find in early Aberdeen. Frank and Maud, both accustomed to finer things, no doubt reluctantly rented this one and moved the family here after a few weeks of sharing space with the Gage family. Here, in December of



1889, Maud gave birth to her third son, Harry Neal Baum. Frank closed his failing Bazaar on January 1st—and bought a newspaper business.

On May 24, 1890, in his *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, he reported the effects of a "mild cyclone" in his own 9th Avenue neighborhood:



Many barns and out-buildings were blown down; one barn ... near ninth avenue being completely demolished.

A wagon and a top-buggy were in the structure and during the cyclone the top of the buggy, with



Mr. Seelen's pig inside it, was blown over

three hundred yards ....

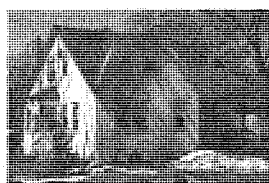
The pig was quite uninjured.

W.W. Denslow illustrations from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

It was while they lived in this 9th Avenue house that Maud dunked her son Frank in the rainwater barrel because he had been cruel to a cat. Her niece, Matilda Jewell Gage, would later write that Frank would have thought such punishment much too harsh.

### 27. 512 S. Kline Street. Now a private residence.

The five Baums—with another child on the way—were not happy with the meager house on 9th Avenue. Frank repeatedly ran ads in the *Saturday Pioneer* seeking something better. He found this Kline Street house in the fall of 1890. It was here that the Baums and some of their friends experimented with spiritualism, seeking table raps from "the other side." Frank saw spiritualism and Theosophy as being more "scientific" than the old-line protestant denominations, and less dull.



The Baum's fourth son, Kenneth Gage Baum, was born in this house in March of 1891, just weeks before Frank printed the last issue of his newspaper and set out for Chicago, seeking work and one more opportunity "to be somebody...." Less than three years earlier he had thought Aberdeen would provide that opportunity.

"After a time," continued Oz, "I ... became a balloonist."  
"What is that?" asked Dorothy.  
"A man who goes up in a balloon on circus day, so as to draw a crowd of people together and get them to pay to see the circus," he explained.

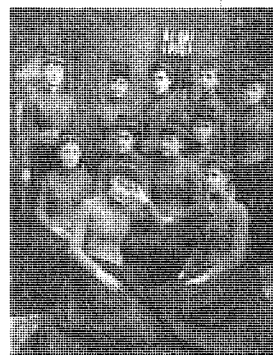


The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

Illustration by W.W. Denslow

After the fair, Baum wrote that "Prof. Ward's balloon ascensions were very successful .... he delighted the vast concourses of people."

Then as now, the chief focus of the fair was on agriculture and farm animals, but then as now the



In their bright red skirts, blue jackets, red hats, and gold trim, the Aberdeen Guards were as eye-catching as they were formidable in their military drill-team precision.

the "Aberdeen Lady Lancers," a girls military drill team, performed. It was this group of young women, performing under the name of the Aberdeen Guards, that so impressed Baum earlier in the year with their "erect and soldier-like bearing" and precision maneuvers that he had Mrs. Bilkins claim they "knocks the spots off'n anything you men folks can do."

In 1904, Baum published his second Oz book, *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. In it, General Jinjur leads her all-activist-female army wearing a remarkably brilliant uniform, "almost



"Good morning, my dears! What can I do for you?"

barbaric" in its splendor. Her troops conquer a surprised Oz, depose its Scarecrow ruler, and briefly rule the country. Baum's plot and John R. Neill's illustrations of the costuming and situations are strongly reminiscent of the Aberdeen Guards and of the comments Baum's Mrs. Bilkins made about the skills of militant women fourteen years earlier in Aberdeen.

## The Hagerty and Lloyd Addition

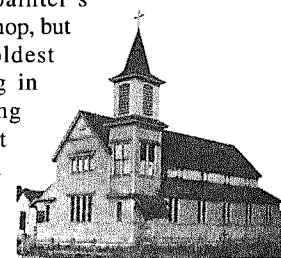
### 20. The shaded area of the map on page 3 shows boundaries of the Hagerty and Lloyd addition.

Return north on Main Street, and turn east on First Avenue, going past the museum and court house. Washington Street is the western boundary of the Hagerty and Lloyd addition.

Frank Hagerty had worked his way west with the railroads and arrived in Jamestown, Dakota, in 1881. He was then twenty-five years old, the same age as Frank Baum. Hearing of a new town being built in the central James River Valley, a town where three rail lines would cross, he persuaded Jamestown banker William Lloyd to allow him to act as his agent. Hagerty came to Aberdeen in 1882 and bought—with Lloyd's money—a tree claim that his surveyor, George Kline, then platted into almost one hundred city blocks, stretching from 6th Avenue South to 8th Avenue North, and from Washington to Dakota Street. Kline was honored with a street name, and so was banker Lloyd. Hagerty's one-third share in the sale of these lots gave him the capital he needed to start other ventures, ventures that made him seem to be a financial wizard. The rest of his story is told in item 6 on page 10.

### 21. 307 1st Avenue South East, original First Presbyterian Church building. Extant, but moved.

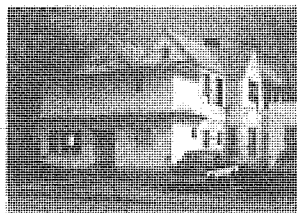
Now it's a painter's warehouse and shop, but it is also the oldest church building in Aberdeen, dating from 1882. Built at 318 South Kline, it was bought by the Zion Lutheran congregation in 1896 and moved to this location. Presbyterian congregations have since built twice on the South Kline Street property (24) donated to them by Frank Hagerty, a devout Presbyterian deacon who donated land to all the early churches in the Hagerty and Lloyd addition.



despite Keeling's published denials—since the rector of an orthodox denomination could not be expected to admit to such beliefs in public. In one "Our Landlady" column Mrs. Bilkins labeled the Reverend Doctor with a satiric malapropism, calling him "the Revenue Doc." She called his parishioners "Piskipalians."

**17. 815 South Main Street, the Aberdeen Club, moved to this location and now used as an apartment house. Also see item 15 on page 13.**

Baum softened his views on the Aberdeen Club when they broadened their membership and promoted one of his favorite projects, artesian irrigation. He editorialized repeatedly on this subject and devoted an "Our Landlady" column to a utopian fantasy in which Mrs. Bilkins pays a visit to a "wizard" farmer who generates electricity with his artesian wells (a common practice, on a small scale) and then runs everything on the farm electrically. He not only washes the dishes with electrical aids, he shrugs his shoulders electrically too; when Mrs. Bilkins spends the night, machines undress her and put her to bed. More seriously, but perhaps with no less fantasy, a promotional piece for the Aberdeen Club in Baum's *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* proclaimed "When through irrigation our beautiful state shall have become one of the most prosperous in the Union, our Club House will be reverently regarded as a landmark...."



This apartment house was once an exclusive club, but is an unlikely candidate for the National Register.

**18. 211 9th Avenue South East, a Baum residence. See page 6 for photo and story.**

Once more on this leg of our journey we leave Main Street. Turn east on 9th Avenue to see the house pictured on page 6. Return to South Main Street for the next location.

**19. The hatch-marked area on the map designates the site of 1890 State Fair, a fair Baum promoted in a special edition of the *Saturday Pioneer*.**

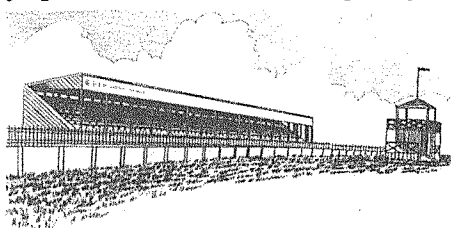
If, some day, archaeologists undertake a dig in the neighborhood of South Main Street and 17th Avenue, will they find traces of an early Dakota-style *circus maximus*? Aberdonians are ac-

customed to thinking that only Huron can have a South Dakota State Fair; but in 1890, the first full year of South Dakota statehood, Aberdeen hosted the first State Fair. We know that the county fairgrounds is north of town; but in 1890, the state fair was held in the new Brown County fairgrounds on South Main Street.

In a special State Fair edition of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* we are asked to imagine ourselves as a visitor walking "down the broad Main street, with its handsome stores and towering brick buildings," and entering the grounds at the south end of Main Street:

The monster enclosure, with its gay bunting, stately buildings and flying flags .... the capacious building, the long line of cattle stalls, sheep sheds, horse stables, the mammoth grand stand, the refreshment booths....

In what is now a quiet residential area, there was a half-mile race track, a 5000 seat grandstand, a judges' tower, horse stalls extending nearly half



The grandstand at the fairgrounds on South Main Street

a mile, an agricultural exhibit building, an arts building, a dairy hall, an education building, a "Main Building," and a "Miscellaneous Hall." There were eight brass bands at the fair—231 musicians on one day—but horses and racing seemed to be the most important part of this fair; fourteen race classes were scheduled, for ponies, stallions, trotters, and pacers, with prizes up to a generous \$300 indicating that paid attendance was substantial. A horse fair such as this might have inspired Rosa Bonheur: there were "graceful Hambletonians, stocky but useful Clydesdales, heavy draft Percherons, Cleveland Bays, Suffolk Punch, Shetland Ponies, England Coach teams, Jacks and Jennets ..." Cattle breeds were as numerous. Baum, a self-published expert on Hamburgs, would have enjoyed the chicken breeders' competition.

Most interesting for Oz fans, three balloon ascensions were scheduled, "with daring leaps from parachutes at terrific heights and in full view of awe-stricken crowds."

... and L. Frank Baum's business locations.

**14. 406 South Main Street, Baum's Bazaar. This site is now used by the south 25' of County Community Health Offices.**

When Baum's sister-in-law, Helen, and her husband Charly—whose name was also Gage—came to Aberdeen in 1887, they bought this 25 by 142 foot lot at 406 South Main Street and built a wood-frame storefront building with an apartment for themselves upstairs. Their building—pictured below and on page 5—measured only forty feet long by twenty feet wide, with a shed attached at the rear and an open stairway on the side. Baum opened his store here on October 1, 1888. It was a store crowded with thousands of inventory items. The 1889-90 City Directory has more product listings for Baum than for any other merchant. He is listed under *Cigars & Tobacco, Confectioners, Crockery & Glassware, Booksellers & Stationers, Florists, Ice Cream, Japanese Goods, Jewelers, Novelties, and Sporting Goods*. He also carried hundreds of toys, the largest stock in town. He installed an elaborate soda fountain, something he called Baum's Ice Cream Boudoir. Hoping to overwhelm competition, he wanted the most and best of everything.

Baum was good at advertising and good at merchandising, but he had no talent for fiscal controls, nor for realistic appraisals. Sometimes he was too busy with baseball to pay attention to business. Baum's Bazaar failed on January 1, 1890. Helen Gage took over the stock and operated it as Gage's Bazaar for several years. Later, her little building was used by a variety of businesses, including, in 1905, the city's first Cadillac and Packard dealerships. In the 1920s the Gage family built a brick building on this site to house the Cozy Lunch. That building and its neighbor, the old Jewett building (13), were demolished in 1967 when a new building was erected for Bostwick's department store, now used by County Community Health offices.

**12. 316-318 South Main, the Excelsior Block. It has been demolished. This site is occupied by City School Offices.**

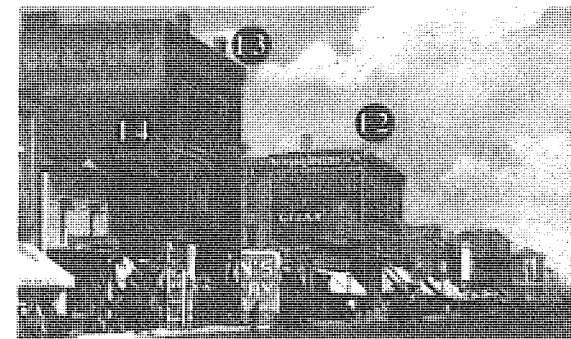
Spencer Narregang was one of Aberdeen's most successful entrepreneurs. He came to the city in 1882 nearly penniless and set up as a pharmacist, but soon found he could make

more money in property development, real estate sales, and loans. He advertised, "We'll sell you the earth and loan you the money to buy it." Narregang and a livestock buyer named Patterson built the three-story Excelsior Block—called Aberdeen's first skyscraper—in 1887, the year before Baum came to Aberdeen. The term *block* meant that it was a building designed to be occupied by a number of tenants. Usually, its ground floor would have been rented to retail establishments and its upper floors to offices. Baum probably used an upper-floor office as premises for his *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*.

Though she seems to question Narregang's credentials, both as a pharmacist and as a loan agent, Baum's fictional landlady feels intimate enough with the handsome, dapper young man to call him Narre, and she mentions him several times.

Narregang prospered in Aberdeen even through the depression of the 1890s and continued to prosper afterwards. Like Baum and others in Aberdeen, he was attracted to Theosophy; Narregang was still preaching its gospel when he returned to visit Aberdeen in 1934, long after he had retired to his Texas ranch. He was then head of the Blavatsky Center of Theosophy in Texas. Successors to companies Narregang founded operate in Aberdeen today.

The Excelsior, by then owned by John Firey (item 3, page 9), was demolished in 1937 to make way for construction of a building to house the Montgomery Ward store. That building is now used for city school offices.



From where the Capitol Theatre would later be built, at center we see the Excelsior Block (12) at 316-318 South Main. It's the three-story building with the Henry George 5c cigar ad. Also see page 13. The Jewett building (13), at 402-404 South Main Street, is left of center. Baum's Bazaar (14) was in the small, dark building to the left of the Jewett building. This photo was taken circa 1908, seventeen years after Baum left Aberdeen, but in this section of Main Street, little of the architecture had changed.

# How to Build a City: the early history of Aberdeen

Adapted from *The Town in the Frog Pond*, by Don Artz

In late nineteenth century America, railroad companies founded most new communities as each rushed to lay track faster than its competitors. They expected to profit both from the freight and passenger traffic these towns would generate, and from the sale and lease of prime city lots. A new end-of-the-line community was certain to be a boom town, at least until the tracks moved onward.

In 1880, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad was building its Hastings and Dakota Division westward through this east-central section of Dakota Territory, an area still devoid of settlers. At the same time, they were building their James River Division to run north and south through the same area. The pace was frantic. William Rehfeld of Warner, who worked on the construction crews, wrote about it in his letters:

During the summer of 1880 we graded 223 miles of railroad from Ortonville to Ashton and Frederick, Dakota, and from Huron to Redfield, Aberdeen and Ordway .... We lived in covered wagons, tents or dugouts.... Everybody had enough railroad work to do for \$1.25 per day for ten hours work.... it took about 4000 good men and about 1500 teams to do this work.

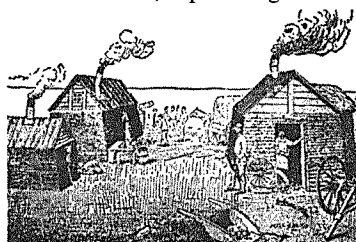
The Milwaukee's original plan for its Hastings & Dakota Division would have taken it from Ortonville on the Minnesota border, west to Bristol or Andover, then northwest to Columbia and Bismarck. Founded in 1879, Columbia was the first town in Brown County. In 1880 it became the county seat and had a post office and a mail route to Jamestown. Columbians were busy building hotels. A new dam on the James River would provide a lake for recreation and transportation and power for a flour mill. Steamboats would soon begin paddling to Ludden and points north on a regular schedule. Columbians hoped their city might become the territorial capitol. All they lacked was a railroad, and they were certain they would get it. But when Prior, the superintendent of the Minneapolis office of the Milwaukee,

contacted the city leaders about right-of-way and property considerations, they made demands that he felt were unacceptably expensive. He changed the route, and grade construction then proceeded west from Bristol until, after angling slightly north, it stopped in August in the middle of a dry slough. It was here that Prior planned to build a city.

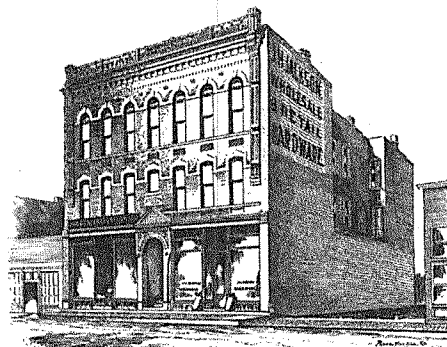
It is unlikely Prior knew his new town site was subject to annual flooding. In the fall of 1880, he was preoccupied with labor problems; but even from his office in Minneapolis, he could see the advantages of the site just by looking at a map. It looked good for freight and passenger business: the new Milwaukee tracks would bisect the planned Chicago and North Western line at a point almost equidistant from the grandly platted new towns of Rudolph and Ordway. It looked good for community development: the North Western's managers had been expecting to benefit from a new city where grade stakes indicated their line would intersect the Milwaukee's James River Division. Prior's revised plan would spoil their hopes. Acting as town site agent for the railway, Prior and his wife Delia bought a half-section of land for \$380 on November 10, 1880. He platted the city of Aberdeen on a portion of this property, and the Watertown Land Office registered the plat on January 3, 1881.

He planned the location of the new city's depot along the end of the grade and centered its main street just to the west of the depot. Then he subdivided sixteen blocks of the property, and in June contracted with Mr. Samuel Jumper to begin selling lots. The tracks and first construction train would not arrive until July 6, but before then, impatient speculators walked or rode from as far as Watertown, eager to be among the first buyers. Unfortunately, after a winter of deep snows and a late spring thaw, many lots on Main Street were under water. George B. Daly, Columbia's first school teacher and later an Aberdeen newspaper publisher, recalled that rival towns "were in great glee over the town in the frog pond."

*Continued on inside back cover (page 19)*



*Aberdeen in June of 1881*



*The Excelsior Block. See pages 7 and 12.*

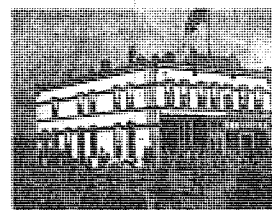
for their wholesale grocery business. Because of their industry and Aberdeen's superior rail connections they prospered greatly and served as a model to others with aspirations to the wholesale trade. By 1887 the Jewetts, now including brother Rollin, had built a three-story brick business-block (pictured on page 7) to house their firm and others.

The Dakota Newspaper Union rented second floor space in the new Jewett building. Their main business was to prepare "boiler plate" columns containing national news and features, to be used by regional newspapers—including Baum's—to supplement local news.

The Jewett family business still operates in Aberdeen as Jewett Drug.

**14. 416 South Main Street, Baum's Bazaar. See pages 5 and 7.**

**15. 3 6th Avenue South West, site of the Federal Land Office building (burned) and the Aberdeen Club (moved), now used by Kusler's C-Store.**



*The Federal Land Office*

This location, on the busy corner of 6th Avenue and Main Street, was first used by a building made for one of the busiest offices in town, the Federal Land Office. The Land Office building burned in 1887 and was temporarily relocated in the new building Helen Gage had built at 416 South Main. (When the Land Office moved out of that building, Baum's Bazaar moved in. See item 14, page 7, and photos, pages 5 and 7.)

In 1890, a new group called the Aberdeen Club bought the empty lot at 6th and Main and built a house-like structure for use as club rooms. The Aberdeen Club was organized as a sort of



*The Aberdeen Club*

Chamber of Commerce, intended to promote commercial activity in the city. In his *Saturday Pioneer*, Baum was repeatedly highly critical, sensing that it was a self-satisfied rich man's club, as evidenced by its \$50 a year dues and its lack of effective activity. The club suspended operations in the 1890s and sold its club house, which then was used as a private residence until moved to its present location. See item 17, page 14.

The Aberdeen Club had a rebirth in 1904 as the Commercial Club. One of the club's first official acts was to buy a three-story hotel for use as club rooms. The Commercial Club later became the Chamber of Commerce.

**16. 22 6th Avenue South East, St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Demolished. Aberdeen TV now uses this site, one block east of Main Street.**

This was Maud Baum's church; Frank faithfully reported on the congregation's social activities and enjoyed participating in their theatrical events, including two operettas held during state fair week in September of 1890. In December of 1890, Baum engaged in a curious exchange with the Reverend Doctor Keeling of Saint Mark's. Baum insisted that one of Keeling's sermons revealed that he was *really* a spiritualist—



*St. Mark's Episcopal Church*



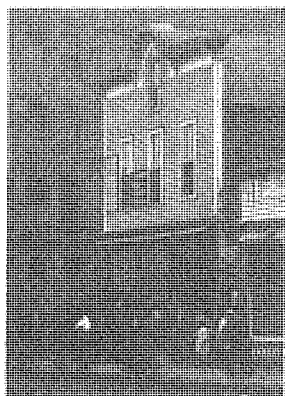
other in Syracuse, and it was Drake's paper that Baum bought and turned into the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. He moved its office from this building to the Excelsior Block (12).

Drake was seen as a "rustler," what we would call a hustler, always an opportunist. In one adventure, he blocked off a city street, claiming he owned it. The court disagreed. In 1892, after Baum had moved to Chicago, political operative Drake accepted an appointment from President Harrison to be consul at Kiel, Germany. When that assignment expired he returned to the Syracuse area and to business.

**10. 301 South Main Street. Beard, Gage & Beard store. Demolished. New Trends occupies its site.**

If Frank and Henry Beard (pronounced Baird) had

not come to Aberdeen, Frank Baum would not have come to Aberdeen. The Beard brothers were friends of T.C. Gage in Fayetteville. They got western fever first, and, hearing about bonanza farms in the Red River Valley, came west in 1880



*Beard, Gage & Beard Store*

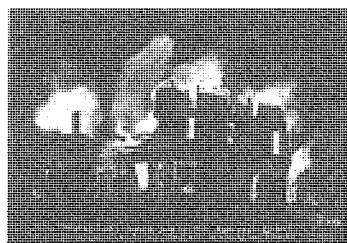
looking for free land. They came to Wheatland, Dakota Territory, west of Fargo on the Northern Pacific Railroad, but found they were a little late for free or even low-priced land in that area. Hearing that a new town called Aberdeen would be served by three railroad lines, they determined to give it a look in the spring of 1881. When they did, they took homesteads as investments. They were soon followed by T.C. Gage, who was under orders from his mother, Matilda Joslyn Gage, to invest wisely in frontier commercial property. With the Beards he bought a corner lot on Main Street and built a store. The store was called Beard, Gage and Beard and sold general merchandise and groceries. It was popular and profitable and led to other opportunities for its founders. They became bank directors and property developers, and each married his Fayetteville sweetheart. Though they dissolved their partnership and T.C. Gage then briefly moved to Bloomington, Illinois, all three would spend the rest of their lives as honored pioneer citizens of Aberdeen.

**11. 106 3rd Avenue South East, the Gottschalk Opera House. It burned in 1910. The Federal Building, built in 1974, now occupies this site.**

Until now, this portion of our tour has followed Main Street, but Charles Gottschalk's "Opera House" was one block east. It occupied the southeast corner of Lincoln Street and 3rd Avenue, on the block now used by the Federal Building.

Mrs. Bilkins called it the "Uproar House," and Baum sometimes referred to it as the "Opera Barn." You will not find Mr. Gottschalk's theater treated with respect in the pages of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. Baum felt himself well qualified to criticize this institution, for he had owned a theater and worked in many. When he wrote to T.C. Gage after his first exploratory visit to Aberdeen, he told him that he hoped that as soon as he became a success as a retailer in Aberdeen he could participate in the establishment of a new opera house. He thought Aberdeen was disgraced by the quality of Charles Gottschalk's theater. Still, that theater was the best place Susan B. Anthony could find for her Aberdeen suffrage campaign in 1890, even with Gage family help.

In truth, the "opera house" was sometimes an exhibition hall, sometimes a skating rink, sometimes a church. Gottschalk seemed always to be struggling with insolvency, but he did rebuild his theater—after Baum had left—only to see it destroyed in one of Aberdeen's most spectacular fires. Had it happened in 1888, Baum would have seen the fire as a great opportunity.



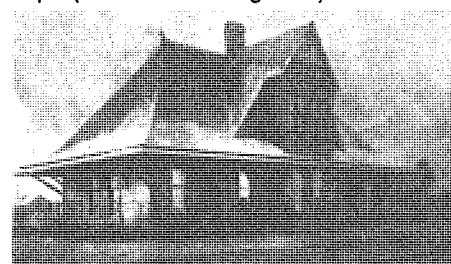
*Gottschalk Opera House Fire, 1910*

**12. 316-318 South Main Street, the Excelsior Block.** See pages 7 for story and photo, and drawing on next page. Baum operated his *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* out of an office in this building.

**13. 402-404 South Main Street, the Jewett building. Demolished. This site is now used by County Community Health Offices.** See photo on page 7. Harvey and Charles Jewett started a retail grocery business in Aberdeen in 1883; before the year was over they had "put a man on the road"

## Begin a Complete Baum Tour at the Depot on Main Street

**1. 12 North Main Street, site of the first Milwaukee Depot (in east-side trackage area). Demolished.**



*The first Milwaukee depot*

The railroad company later called "The Milwaukee" was usually referred to in Baum's time as the C. M. & St. P., a clumsy abbreviation for the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway company. The company's townsite agent, Charles Prior, had chosen the city's site in 1880, had it platted, and named it for the Scottish hometown of the railway's president, Alexander Mitchell. Prior sited the first depot almost a block east of Main Street. It was built in 1881.

In October of 1888, just eight days after the opening of Baum's Bazaar, the depot lunch counter was visited by thirteen Lakota chiefs and Sitting Bull, all on their way to Washington, D.C., to plead for a more equitable price for the treaty lands they were being required to surrender. Townspeople, with the 1876 defeat of Custer still a fresh scar on their memories, accorded Sitting Bull respect, or at least a grudging awe. It is possible that Baum was among the curious spectators who crowded the depot platform that night.

At that time construction had begun on a larger depot west of Main Street, to replace the original depot. It was completed in 1889, burned in 1911, and was replaced that same year by the present much larger depot. The Milwaukee's facilities are now used by the Burlington Northern Railroad.

**2. 21-23 South Main Street, the Northwestern National Bank Building. Extant. It is now used for the Dacotah Prairie Museum.**

In 1888, some Chicago investors decided Aberdeen's economy looked bright. They planned a new business office building, the largest yet built in the city, with their Northwestern National Bank as its anchor tenant. It was under construction when Baum arrived. His brother-in-law, T.C. Gage, who had been named an of-

ficer of the bank, would have given Baum the grand tour of this building. The bank opened in February of 1889, while Baum still had high hopes for his Bazaar and for Aberdeen.

Other early tenants in the Northwestern National Bank Building included three real estate offices, two grocery stores, a druggist, and seven law firms. In one of Baum's "Our Landlady" columns Mrs. Bilkins visits the lawyers in this building. She represents her church ladies missionary society and attempts without success to collect funds to buy hairpins for "the poor heathen wimmin in Africanistan."

The Northwestern National Bank went out of business in 1892, with no harm to its depositors. Its founders' optimistic hopes, like Baum's, were dashed on the rocks of depression, and by 1892 that depression was becoming national.

Bought in 1907 by Frank Hagerty's younger brother, Jay (for whom Jay Street was named), the building was then called the Hagerty Block.



*The Northwestern National Bank Building (Dacotah Prairie Museum)*

The primary tenant for many years was the Western Union company. Later owners donated the building to the county for use as a museum, a purpose it serves today. The museum features Baum-period displays, a replica of the Gage family parlor in Fayetteville, and a supply of Baum and Gage related books in its store.

**3. 101 South Main, John Firey's Drug Store and (perhaps) the Aberdeen Republican. Demolished.**

After Mrs. Bilkins fails to get donations for "the poor heathen wimmin in Africanistan" from the lawyers in the Northwestern National Bank building (2), she sallies across the street south to solicit from the competitor Baum most often ridiculed, the white-suited dandy, C. Boyd Barrett, at the offices of his *Aberdeen Republican*. Despite its name, the *Republican* was promoted as "The only Democratic Paper in Central Dakota." Barrett's offices were apparently in a rear sec-

tion of fellow Democrat John Firey's drug store, or perhaps upstairs. In Baum's literary imagination Barrett is no more generous than the lawyers, and Mrs. Bilkins catches him in the midst of plagiarizing his editorial from the encyclopedia to boot. This sort of journalistic horseplay did not amuse Barrett. A Confederate major and aristocratic Virginian, he complained haughtily to Baum, "personalities, sir, are not journalism, sir." But for Baum, personalities *were* journalism, since he could not hope to compete otherwise with the broad news coverage, partisan backing, and political preferment that sustained his competitors. Barrett fought back in print by accusing Baum of embezzling funds from the baseball team he had managed. After a final potshot, Baum never mentioned Barrett again.

John Firey's building was older than the city itself, having been moved here from a failed "sooner" settlement south of town. It is pictured here after Firey rented it to "Doc" Lacey, whose family continued its use as a pharmacy for decades. Firey, the city's first pharmacist and a Democratic politician, rated some good-humored mentions from Mrs. Bilkins.

**4. 106 South Main Street, the Ward Lunch Counter. It burned in 1926. Its site is now occupied by the Alonzo Ward Hotel.**

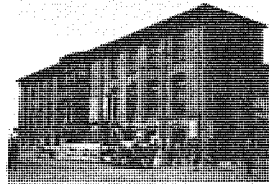


The first Alonzo Ward Hotel, circa 1910

Alonzo Ward and his lunch counter are often mentioned in Baum's "Our Landlady" columns, and many good-natured jokes are at Ward's expense. Baum probably stopped at Ward's "horse-shoe counter" almost daily, and it is not hard to picture him there, bantering with the regulars, picking up gossip and political opinions, smoking a cigar, trying to sell a little advertising.

Ward's fortunes continued to advance after Baum and many others had dejectedly left town, their dreams and fortunes in tatters. By 1897, he had built a good hotel around his lunch room. That hotel burned in 1926 and was replaced in 1928 by the present Alonzo Ward Hotel. The Ward coffee shop today is in the same location as Ward's original lunch counter.

**5. 126 South Main Street, the Union Bank Building. Extant, though much changed. Its Main Street retail space is now occupied by Closet to Closet.**



This was one of several three-story "skyscrapers" erected in the last years of the 1880s. During most of Baum's time in Aberdeen this office building was home to the Aberdeen Building and Loan Association, of which his brother-in-law T.C. Gage was vice-president. See item 7, page 11. It was also home to the *Aberdeen Daily News*, Baum's most effective competitor.

**6. 202 South Main Street, the F. H. Hagerty and Co. Bank. Demolished. Its site is now occupied by the Citizens Building.**

Frank Hagerty's bank was housed in a two-story building. Ever-generous, Hagerty had donated a portion of the second floor to the first public library in Aberdeen, a predecessor to the Carnegie-endowed Alexander Mitchell Library. His bank building also housed the Aberdeen Telephone Company and the Keystone Mortgage Company, among other Hagerty-supported ventures.

Hagerty, with no money of his own, had developed the Hagerty and Lloyd addition in 1883. Leveraging the commissions he earned, he soon owned this bank and a real estate agency. He was a major stockholder in the phone company, the Aberdeen Light and Power company, the *Aberdeen Daily News*, a plow factory, several small-town banks, a couple of railroads, the Keystone Mortgage Company, and the Friesland Livestock Company. In 1885, an article in the *Chicago Times* called the twenty-nine year-old Hagerty "the richest man in central Dakota."

No Aberdeen citizen was more frequently mentioned in Baum's *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. Baum sometimes praised Hagerty as being the most public spirited of Aberdeen's leaders but sometimes

criticized him for investing in other cities and for lack of leadership. He also thought of the *Aberdeen Daily News* as a powerful competitor, with more political influence than Baum could match, and he thought of it as Hagerty's paper.

When Hagerty's bank failed, in October of 1890, Baum first reported only the Hagerty press release, that it was just a temporary setback—a phrase Baum had used when he closed his Bazaar. In January of 1891, Baum was the first to reveal in print the truth that Hagerty's financial failure was nearly total and that investors in all Hagerty ventures had little reason to hope for more than pennies on the dollar. This realization of failure, where all had seemed so glorious, may have made Baum begin to understand that there was no hope for his own future in Aberdeen. Indeed, Hagerty's failure seems emblematic of the end of the Dakota Boom, just as his success had been an example of its opportunities. If there is a model for the Wizard of Oz in Baum's Aberdeen experience it is surely Hagerty, to whom the citizens had entrusted their fate, believing he was infallible and had everything under control. His newspaper sometimes supplied the optimistic green glasses.

In unmasking Hagerty, Baum came to see him as a mostly unintentional fraud, ensnared by his partly accidental reputation—not an evil man but a humbug, working behind the scenes, "lobbying and wire pulling, full of schemes and plans."

Hagerty spent most of his later years running his father-in-law's business in Arch Springs, Pennsylvania. Aberdeen's Arch Street owes its name to that town, as its Pennsylvania Street does to Hagerty's home state.

**7. 206 South Main Street, the Building and Loan Association. Extant, it is now used by the Studio Nine beauty salon.**

T.C. Gage was a participant in many early Aberdeen ventures, but it may be that the one with the most enduring interest for him was the Building and Loan Association of which he was vice-president. He remained in the home loan business most of his life.

When Baum arrived in Aberdeen the firm had offices in the Union Bank Building (item 5, page 10). Their elegant new building was completed in January of 1891, not long before Baum left town. The Association had then been active for five years and had financed more than two hundred Aberdeen homes, a large percentage of the total built in that period.

Building & Loan Association

**8. 215-223 South Main Street, the Sherman House. It burned in 1906, was replaced by another Sherman Hotel in 1908, which was later demolished and replaced by the Sherman Apartments.**

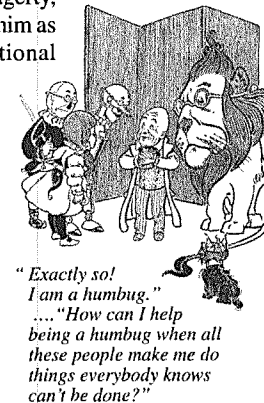


The Sherman House

When Jim Ringrose opened the Sherman House in late 1881, it was the finest hotel in the city; Ringrose claimed it was "the largest hotel west of Minneapolis." Of course he meant "...on the Milwaukee line." It was the city's social center when Baum arrived, and its corner was esteemed as Aberdeen's prime retail business location until recent decades. Ringrose was an Irish Catholic, a leading saloon operator, and a power in the Democratic party, not characteristics that would have endeared him to Baum. Still, in his *Saturday Pioneer*, Baum seems to show more than mere tolerance toward the man for whom the most common epithet is "genial."

**9. 222 South Main Street, Dakota Pioneer offices. Demolished. Its site is now occupied by Computer Associates.**

John H. Drake came to Aberdeen in its earliest days and published his first edition of the *Dakota Pioneer* in August of 1881. His was the second newspaper published in Aberdeen, but he misdated it, presumably so that he could claim it was the first. Baum and Drake had known each



W.W. Denslow illustration