

Dorothy Louise Gage (June 11, 1898-November 15, 1898)

Dorothy Louise Gage's life, though short, had a lasting impact that continued after her death. She was born on June 11, 1898, in Bloomington, Illinois, to Sophie and Thomas Gage. The family lived on North McLean Street. Just over five months after her birth, Dorothy became very sick with an illness that lasted 24 hours. A doctor, George B. Kelso, diagnosed her with "congestion of the brain," which could have been Meningitis or Equine Encephalitis, both of which affect the brain and can be deadly. Sadly, Dorothy passed away on November 15, 1898.

Her family was deeply saddened. Thomas's sister, Maud Baum, wrote that she felt as if she could have loved Dorothy as her own child. Dorothy was buried on November 16, 1898, at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. Maud came to the funeral from Chicago, and she was so upset afterward that she needed medical help. Soon after Dorothy's death, the Gage family moved to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where they stayed for the rest of their lives.

At first, it seemed like Dorothy's story would end there. But her name was kept alive by her uncle, L. Frank Baum, Maud's husband. Baum was the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which was published in 1900. He and Maud had always wanted a daughter, and seeing how sad Maud was about Dorothy's death, he decided to name the main character in his story after her. Although it could be a coincidence that Dorothy was a popular name at the time, many experts believe Baum named the character after Dorothy Gage. The last name was changed to Gale, possibly because it was easier to say or because the "l" might stand for her middle name, Louise.

The connection between Dorothy Gage and Dorothy Gale was uncovered by historian Sally Roesch Wagner. She was researching Maud's mother, Matilda Joslyn Gage, a suffragette, when she discovered Dorothy Gage's grave. Wagner shared this information, and interest grew in restoring the grave of the girl who inspired Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*. Mickey Carroll, an actor who played one of the Munchkins in the 1939 movie, helped arrange for a new headstone. Carroll's family had a monument making business, and he carved and donated a new one. It was placed at the foot of the grave, leaving the original marker, which had become worn and hard to read, in place. The new headstone was revealed on May 31, 1997, during a ceremony to raise funds for a new children's section in the cemetery in Dorothy's honor.

However, it was later discovered that the original headstone had the wrong date of death—November 11, 1898. The correct date was November 15, 1898, which is confirmed by official records and a newspaper announcement from that day.

Though Dorothy's life was brief, her memory lives on through the character of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, thanks to her uncle, L. Frank Baum.