

[http://web.archive.org/web/20071209193251/
http://www.northern.edu/hastingw/baumedts.htm#sitting](http://web.archive.org/web/20071209193251/http://www.northern.edu/hastingw/baumedts.htm#sitting)

A. Waller Hastings
Northern State University
Aberdeen, SD 57401

L. Frank Baum's Editorials on the Sioux Nation

[The Sitting Bull editorial](#) (*Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, December 20, 1890)

[The Wounded Knee editorial](#) (*Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, January 3, 1891)

Ten years before he wrote *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, L. Frank Baum published an obscure weekly newspaper, the *Saturday Pioneer*, in Aberdeen, S.D. The *Saturday Pioneer* was a mix of boilerplate features and news stories, local society news, humor and arts columns, and editorials about the issues of the day. During Baum's tenure at the paper (from January 1890 to March 1891), the chief issues about which he editorialized were the 1890 elections and the question of which city, Pierre or Huron, would be made the capital of the new state of South Dakota.

1890 was also the year of one of the darkest passages in the troubled history of relations between Native Americans and the expanding white population. On the afternoon of December 28, 1890, units of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry captured a group of Minneconjou Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee Creek in southwestern South Dakota. The next day, as the Indians surrendered their weapons, a shot rang out and the cavalry opened fire. At least 153 of the Sioux were killed (some estimate nearly 300, out of a band of about 350) -- most of them women, children, and unarmed men. (These figures reflect the account of the massacre given in Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Henry Holt, 1970, pp. 439-45.)

In his newspaper, Baum responded to the news of the Wounded Knee massacre, and to word of the murder of Hunkpapa Sioux leader Sitting Bull two weeks earlier (December 15, 1890), with editorials calling for the total destruction of the Sioux people. The originals of these editorials are difficult to obtain; the only relatively complete run of the *Saturday Pioneer* is held by the [Alexander Mitchell Library](#) in Aberdeen, where it can be viewed on microfilm.

Baum's Wounded Knee editorials have previously been published [elsewhere](#) on the World Wide Web. However, at least one paragraph was inadvertently omitted from that version of the editorials. While the missing paragraph does not exonerate Baum of charges of genocidal racism, it seemed advisable to offer a complete transcription of the editorials as they appeared in the newspaper, so that scholars and other interested parties might base their understanding of this

incident in our history on the complete version of what Baum wrote. The editorials are given below.

[Back to top](#)

The Sitting Bull Editorial

Sitting Bull, most renowned Sioux of modern history, is dead.

He was not a Chief, but without Kingly lineage he arose from a lowly position to the greatest Medicine Man of his time, by virtue of his shrewdness and daring.

He was an Indian with a white man's spirit of hatred and revenge for those who had wronged him and his. In his day he saw his son and his tribe gradually driven from their possessions: forced to give up their old hunting grounds and espouse the hard working and uncongenial avocations of the whites. And these, his conquerors, were marked in their dealings with his people by selfishness, falsehood and treachery. What wonder that his wild nature, untamed by years of subjection, should still revolt? What wonder that a fiery rage still burned within his breast and that he should seek every opportunity of obtaining vengeance upon his natural enemies.

The proud spirit of the original owners of these vast prairies inherited through centuries of fierce and bloody wars for their possession, lingered last in the bosom of Sitting Bull. With his fall the nobility of the Redskin is extinguished, and what few are left are a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them. The Whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent, and the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians. Why not annihilation? Their glory has fled, their spirit broken, their manhood effaced; better that they die than live the miserable wretches that they are. History would forget these latter despicable beings, and speak, in later ages of the glory of these grand Kings of forest and plain that Cooper loved to heroism.

We cannot honestly regret their extermination, but we at least do justice to the manly characteristics possessed, according to their lights and education, by the early Redskins of America.

(Saturday Pioneer, December 20, 1890)

It is the second paragraph of the above editorial that is missing from the previously published on-line version of Baum's writing.

[Back to top](#)

The Wounded Knee Editorial

The peculiar policy of the government in employing so weak and vacillating a person as General Miles to look after the uneasy Indians, has resulted in a terrible loss of blood to our soldiers, and a battle which, at its best, is a disgrace to the war department. There has been plenty of time for prompt and decisive measures, the employment of which would have prevented this disaster.

The Pioneer has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extirmination [sic] of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth. In this lies future safety for our settlers and the soldiers who are under incompetent commands. Otherwise, we may expect future years to be as full of trouble with the redskins as those have been in the past.

An eastern contemporary, with a grain of wisdom in its wit, says that "when the whites win a fight, it is a victory, and when the Indians win it, it is a massacre."

(Saturday Pioneer, January 3, 1891)

The final paragraph is separated from the rest of the editorial by a line, which usually in Baum's newspaper indicated a change of subject. However, it does appear to be a further comment upon the events at Wounded Knee, and so has been included here.

[Back to top](#)

[Return to Wally Hastings' Children's Literature Page](#)

[Return to Wally Hastings' Home Page](#)