

This Day in History... November 29, 1832

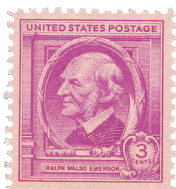
Birth of Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott was born on November 29, 1832, in Germantown, Pennsylvania.

The second of four daughters, Louisa was born to social worker Abby May and educator Amos Bronson Alcott. When she was two, Alcott's family moved to Boston where her father opened an experimental school. While there, he also joined the Transcendental Club with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Her father's transcendentalist beliefs had a great impact on Alcott, making her strive for perfection throughout her life.



From the Famous American Authors set



Emerson was one of the leading voices of the Transcendentalist movement.

Throughout the early 1840s, the Alcott family moved several times before settling in a Concord homestead they named Hillside in 1845. While Alcott's father was largely responsible for her education, she also learned a lot from his author friends, including Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Margaret Fuller.

Alcott's family suffered financially, leading her to take jobs at an early age. She worked as a teacher, seamstress, governess, and writer. In fact, writing soon became her favorite hobby. In 1849, Alcott published her first book, *Flower Fables*, a collection of stories she wrote for Ellen, the daughter of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

During the late 1840s, Alcott's family home served as a safe house along the Underground Railroad, hiding a fugitive slave for a week. Alcott was also inspired by the Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights and was the first woman to register to

vote in her town.

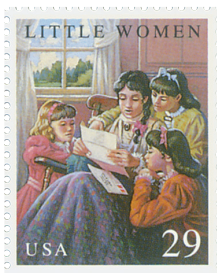
In 1860, Alcott began working as a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly*, but when the Civil War broke out the following year, she went to Washington, DC, to serve as a nurse. She planned to work there for three months, but contracted typhoid. During her time as a nurse, Alcott sent letters home that were then published in Boston's antislavery newspaper as *Hospital Sketches*. These stories gave Alcott her first widespread recognition for her writing.



The first US stamp to picture a hospital. It was issued for the 250th anniversary of New York's Bellevue.

Soon Alcott adopted the pen name A.M. Barnard and wrote a string of novels for adults including *A Long Fatal Love Chase* and *Pauline's Passion and Punishment*. In 1867 she became the editor of *Merry's Museum*, a magazine for young girls. At the urging of her publisher to create a book for girls, she wrote *Little Women*.

First published in 1868, *Little Women* tells of four sisters growing up in post-Civil War New England. Through an array of relatable characters, Alcott guides readers through the trials and tribulations often encountered by young women of her day. Additional challenges are posed by poverty and gender constraints of the time. But Alcott shows these struggles can be overcome as the girls grow from "little women" into successful adults.



From the Children's Classic stamps, which were issued to coincide with the conference of Literacy Volunteers of America.

Little Women was an immediate success. Instantly popular with the public, this classic gave American juvenile fiction an enduring family story. One reviewer called it, "the very best of books to reach the hearts of the young of any age from six to sixty." Alcott continued the family's story with *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886). Over the course of her career, Alcott wrote about 270 works.

In her final years, Alcott suffered persistent health problems. She and some of her biographers believed it was mercury poisoning, stemming from a treatment she received for typhoid during the Civil War. But more recent researchers believe she may have had an autoimmune disease. Alcott died from a stroke on March 6, 1888, just two days after her father's death. She was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts, on "Authors' Ridge" near Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau.

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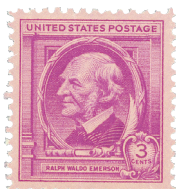
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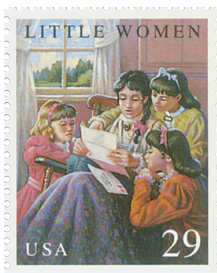
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