

REMARKS OF JON HARLAN LIVEZEY, ESQ.

WILLIAM B. BAKER PORTRAIT HANGING CEREMONY

HARFORD COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT

23 July 1982

May it please the Court -

Your Honors, members of the Baker family and of the bar,
special guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my privilege today to represent the Bar of Harford County in this brief ceremony to do honor to a citizen prominent in our county's history. As a practitioner of the law in Aberdeen, I am particularly pleased that a gentleman from that community is the subject of a portrait to be placed among those of other distinguished citizens of the county.

Unlike the majority of the individuals so honored, the man we recognize today was neither a member of the bench or bar nor was he prominently associated with the county seat. Although of the minority party, he did share with a number of the previous honorees a history of service in the political arena.

William Benjamin Baker epitomizes the successful community leader of late nineteenth century small-town America. He rose from

membership in a respectable and prospering country farming family to become one of the wealthiest and most influential citizens in a village which he helped turn into a town with all the symbols and accouterments of late Victorian propriety, and he capped his career with election to the United States Congress.

His family background was not that of the plantation aristocracy, whose descendants are well represented on the walls of this courthouse, but he was of solid Harford County stock. His ancestry included such well established local families as Wood, Cole, Hanson, Cashman, Clarke, Hollis, and Garrettson. His paternal grandfather, Nicholas Baker, a farmer and country merchant, was the third Nicholas Baker in a direct line to dwell in the Carsins' Run neighborhood. His father, George Washington Baker, is credited with pioneering the fruit and vegetable canning industry in lower Harford County, which was the source of his family's considerable prosperity, as well as that of numerous other families in the community. The congressman's mother was Elizabeth Greenland, a member of a long established family in the Carsins' Run area.

He was born July 22nd, 1840, at the family homestead at Carsins' Run, now the residence of Dr. and Mrs. Peter P. Rodman. He was the second child and oldest son of fifteen children in a family strongly adherent to the principles of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His education was obtained locally and he began his business career in

the family canning enterprises. He and his brothers, Charles, James, John, and George, building on the foundation of their father's business, became substantial canners and packers in the Aberdeen vicinity.

During the course of his business ventures, Mr. Baker acquired considerable agricultural real estate in lower Harford. His success enabled him to build a large and imposing mansion on West Bel Air Avenue in Aberdeen, as did his brothers James and Charles. Brother John had a smaller place on the same street. All those homes are still standing. Brother George built his large residence in Havre de Grace, his wife's hometown, and it later became the first Havre de Grace Hospital.

Mr. Baker was married in 1868 to Mary Olivia Wells and she and their infant son died the following year. In 1872 he married Mary Catharine Hollis and they had four children, one of whom died in infancy. The other three were Jessie May (Mrs. T. Arthur Cronin), Hollis Roswell, and Nettie Florence (Mrs. Phineas Morris). Mr. Baker's grandson, Dr. L. Eugene Cronin, will shortly have more to say about the family.

In 1875, our subject entered the political frays as a Republican candidate for the House of Delegates, but was not victorious in this heavily Democratic county in an era of strong partisan loyalty.

However he was elected to the House for one term in 1881. In 1893, after one unsuccessful try, he was elected to the State Senate of Maryland from Harford County. He left that office after a year due to his election to Congress as the first Republican representative from the Second Congressional District. He was re-elected by a wide majority in 1896 and served until 1901. Dr. Cronin will elucidate further on his grandfather's Congressional service.

In addition to his agricultural and political pursuits, Congressman "Billy" Baker, as he was widely known, was an important figure in local banking circles. He was one of the organizers of the First National Bank of Aberdeen and was its first president, serving in that office from 1891 to 1911. His son Hollis was to serve in the same capacity from 1919 to 1925. That bank was merged into the Equitable Trust Company in 1963. Mr. Baker was also a prominent organizer, stockholder, and director of the First National Bank of Havre de Grace, now part of the Maryland National Bank. In line with his interest in upgrading the Aberdeen community, he served as president of the Harford County Telephone Company. Fraternally, he was affiliated with both the Odd Fellows' and Masonic lodges of Aberdeen.

Congressman Baker died in his 71st year on the 17th of May, 1911. He was buried in Bakers' Cemetery, between Aberdeen and Carsins' Run, which his family had established for the community and which contains a number of imposing monuments erected in memory of members of

his family.

Mr. Baker, whose service to the community we honor today, was truly an upbuilder of the Town of Aberdeen, and his descendants and numerous kinsmen can take pride in the accomplishments of their distinguished relative.

Thank you.