

# A RICH TO REMEMBER

LORENZO DOW BAKER - "King of Jamaica" - "Citizen  
of Wellfleet" - "Founder of fruit industry  
in United States"

"There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of life is bound in shallows and in miseries." (Shakespeare: Julius Caesar)

Lorenzo Dow Baker recognized the tide in his affairs, took it at the flood, and it lead him on to fortune. In between the flood of the tide and the ebb of his life, he filled that life as full as a human could with adventure, romance, charity, service, and an originality and imagination that enabled him to turn apparent adversity into success.

Lorenzo was born at Wellfleet, Massachusetts, on 15 March 1840. Although he carried the BAKER - and not the RICH - surname, which is equal in history and heritage to any other Cape Cod name, he had as much, or more, Rich ancestry as any other individual of Cape Cod parentage. He was the son, grandson, great-grandson, great-great-grandson, and great-great-great-grandson of a Rich, and in some generations he had double Rich descent.

It seems likely that Lorenzo Dow Baker was either a direct or collateral descendant of William or Nathaniel Baker who were of Watertown, Massachusetts, in 1636 where they shared in the fourth division of land. This William Baker "of Watertown" was licensed "to come and dwell within this government" (PCR, Vol 1, p 102) and in 1641 he was described as a "coop" and permitted to live at Yarmouth "but not to have the land" (PCR, Vol II, p 17). Lorenzo's descent from either William or Nathaniel Baker has not been documented, but it is documented that he was a direct descendant of Francis Baker who came in the PLANTER in 1635 from England.



Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker

## A Rich to Remember (continued)

This is Lorenzo's descent in both the Rich and Baker families:

### Rich Descent

#### Generation

- 1 Richard and Sarah (Roberts) Rich
- 2 John and Mary (Treat) Rich
- 3 Reuben and Ruth (Brown) Rich
- 4 Reuben and Anna (Thayer) Rich
- 5 David and Thankful (Rich) Baker
- 6 Lorenzo Dow Baker

also

- 1 Richard and Sarah (Roberts) Rich
- 2 Sarah (Rich) and Isaac Baker (see below)

also

- 1 Richard and Sarah (Roberts) Rich
- 2 Richard and Anna ( ) Rich
- 3 Obadiah and Mary (Crowell) Rich
- 4 Deborah (Rich) and David Baker (see below)

### Baker Descent

- 1 Francis and Isabel (Twining) Baker
- 2 John and Alice (Pearce) Baker
- 3 Isaac and Sarah (Rich) Baker
- 4 Richard and Elizabeth (Wetherell) Baker
- 5 David and Deborah (Rich) Baker
- 6 David and Rachel (Hopkins) Baker
- 7 David and Thankful (Rich) Baker
- 8 Lorenzo Dow Baker

The Baker family was first of Yarmouth, and Isaac Baker (third in Baker descent above) was listed as early as 1711 in the north precinct of Eastham, which later became Wellfleet. The family home was on Bound Brook Island, and today on that "island" a house stands which may be on the same land owned by Isaac Baker or, indeed, may be a part of the same house that Isaac Baker occupied and which his son, Richard, occupied after him. Owned now by the Biddle family, this is the house in which Lorenzo Dow Baker was born (see page 9).

The timespan of boyhood on Cape Cod in the early and middle 1800's was very short. Wellfleet was a fishing community; before a boy was six he knew most of the nautical terms. Before he was ten or twelve he was at sea, either with his captain father or apprenticed to a sea captain. The school at Bound Brook Island was attended by Lorenzo, but schooling was not permitted to interfere with making a living. Lorenzo's father, like all other Wellfleet fathers, was land-rich and financially poor, complementing an income derived from the sea by eking out of the soil farm products to feed his family.

Wellfleet was a religious community, and Lorenzo's family had been members of the Wellfleet Methodist Church since its beginning before 1800. Methodism at that time was a fire and brimstone religion, and he was named for the Methodist clergyman, Lorenzo Dow, who died in 1834. The strong religion that was bred into Lorenzo was to permeate his entire life and become his strength in moments of trial.

Lorenzo's mother died when he was six years old, and within two years his father married, at age forty-nine, Betsey M. (Higgins) Smith, daughter of Eleazer and Louisiana Higgins and widow of James Smith. She had children by her first marriage, and instantly the Baker household was drastically increased. This was the end of Lorenzo's boyhood; within two years he was apprenticed to a fishing captain and went to sea at age ten.



Lorenzo Dow Baker's Birthplace

At age nineteen, Lorenzo attended Wilbraham Academy, in western Massachusetts, for one year, as did his brothers at reaching the same age. It seems very likely that Isaac Rich, Boston merchant and cousin to Lorenzo's Rich grandfather, had something to do with this, as Isaac Rich was the founder of the Methodist Boston University, Wesleyan University in Connecticut, and Wilbraham Academy, and is known to have combed the Cape for candidates for the Methodist schools of higher learning, at which he had set up scholarships. One year at Wilbraham was enough for Lorenzo, and he then went back to sea, this time as captain of the schooner ROBERT D. RHODES.

On 19 December 1861 Lorenzo married Martha Hopkins, daughter of Thomas and Hope (Hamblen) Hopkins of Wellfleet and granddaughter of Joshua and Drucilla (Ryder) Hamblen. The grandfather, Joshua Hamblen, gave the young couple a home in Wellfleet called "The Homestead," which stands today. This marriage produced four sons and a daughter: Reuben Rich Baker, Joshua Hamblen Baker, Lorenzo Dow Baker, and Martha Alberta Baker. Another son, also named Lorenzo, died young.

Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker went to sea again in the TELEGRAPH out of Wellfleet, fishing, transporting cargoes, contracting to take anyone anywhere, always operating a not quite first-class schooner, and always in debt. The tide which was to lead him to fortune swelled towards him in 1870 when he contracted to carry a group of gold hunters and their equipment up the Orinoco River in Venezuela. After fulfilling his contract, he did not want to sail home without a cargo and put into Port Morant, Jamaica, in search of something salable. It is strange and a little eerie that Jamaica should figure so prominently in Lorenzo's life. It must have been filled with the ghosts of his Rich ancestor, Richard Rich, mariner, who plied back and forth on the sea between Jamaica and Piscataqua nearly two hundred years earlier and may have been blown into the sea when Port Royal exploded in 1692. Or with the ghosts of the Earl of Manchester's descendant, Governor Mandeville (1814), descendant of Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, for whom the town of Mandeville in the parish of Manchester in Jamaica is named, or with the ghost of Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, who was in Jamaica in 1643.

At Port Morant in 1870 Captain Baker took on board a cargo consisting of bamboo, pineapples, cocoanuts, and 160 bunches of bananas for which he paid a shilling a bunch, putting out to sea and arriving at Jersey City on a voyage of thirteen days, selling the fruit at point of destination at \$2.00 a bunch, and immediately realizing the potential of this type of cargo, if it could be kept in eatable condition. He sailed back to Wellfleet and marked time for a while in his regular fishing pursuits until he could ready his ship for a return trip to Jamaica.

In the Spring of 1871 he sailed back to Jamaica, again in the TELEGRAPH out of Wellfleet, this time putting in at Port Antonio. He loaded, along with other tropical fruit, 1,450 bunches of bananas, for which he again paid one shilling a bunch. This time he put in at Boston, and the bananas sold there between \$2.50 and \$3.00 a bunch, thereby convincing him that his hunch was right and that there was great potential in transportation of fruit from Jamaica to Boston.

Captain Baker continued for a time his regular cargo-carrying, including only as extra cargo bananas from Jamaica, which he carried back to Boston, turning them over to Andrew W. Preston, who sold them on a commission basis. He had mixed success with several successive cargoes of bananas, some spoiling before he could land them, and he knew it would take full-time participation to assure a permanent, successful trade of this sort. With this in mind in 1875 he set up headquarters at Port Antonio and became partner in the Standard Steam Navigation Company for transportation of fruit.

He was, however, attempting to deal with a people "just up from slavery who had recently seen their sugar business collapse and economic ruin everywhere." The sugar-cane farmers were dirt poor and discouraged. He traveled far and wide on the island, talking with the natives, explaining the possibilities in an expanded banana-producing economy, and, returning to Port Antonio, he set up a system of expanded production, including conveying the crops to his vessels and getting the fruit back home in eatable condition. He purchased plantations on the island, brought in capable whites from Wellfleet and elsewhere to help improve the lot of the natives, and employed the natives in an all-out effort to establish a continuous trade. He brought in a minister, built churches, set up villages and shelters in which the natives had good, safe housing. Gradually he turned the economy around. It was a massive economic achievement. He described it this way: "I have picked up little strands of business and made a cable of success and wound them together - wound them together one after the other." In this process he not only insured a lucrative future for himself and partners, but he endeared himself to the natives of Jamaica by his efforts to improve their lot.

The "winding together" consisted of the establishment of the L. D. Baker Company in 1880 with Lorenzo as president. In 1885 he persuaded Andrew W. Preston, his sales-commission agent in Boston, to come into partnership with him in an independent fruit agency, and so the Boston Fruit Company was born. Lorenzo was its president; Andrew W. Preston was the Boston sales manager, and it had a capital of \$500,000. The headquarters were at the head of Long Wharf in Boston, and



Belvernon, on Baker Avenue, in Wellfleet (about 1920)

in 1889 they advertised themselves as "Importers and growers of Tropical Fruit, Plantations at Jamaica, West Indies, Cable Address 'Banana', regular lines of steamers for passengers and freight to Kingston, Port Antonio, GreyTown, Livingston, Tortilla." The officers listed at Boston were J. H. Freeman, general manager, A. W. Preston, assistant manager, and L. D. Baker, manager Office of the Tropics. The Boston Fruit Company operated in conjunction with the Standard Steam Navigation Company, the first president of which was Jesse H. Freeman, and Captain Baker became president after the death of Freeman. Lorenzo gave up his beloved sailing vessels for the steam-operated vessel. He explained the transition from sails to steam: "... From a rowboat we went to a cutter and then to a steamer, from a steamer to steamers, and then to larger and yet larger steamers."

At first Lorenzo's family remained at Wellfleet, where he had built the estate called "Belvernon," which stands today and is occupied by his grandson, Reuben Rich Baker, Jr. As Captain Baker's business with Jamaica grew, he set up a home for his family there and took them with him for a good part of each year, along with his inlaws, his friends, and in fact, anyone responsible who could help in the new industry. They all melted into the Jamaican culture. But he was always a Wellfleet "boy," and if no other name is remembered today at Wellfleet, his is. As he became more and more successful, he tried to bring some of the new-found prosperity to his neighbors and to his hometown. It is said that at one time when economic conditions were bad he shouldered the mortgages of 28 persons at Wellfleet, giving them free rent for the rest of their lives. It is also said, facetiously, that practically everyone in Wellfleet was at one time or another a "partner" of Lorenzo's. His aid to the Wellfleet Methodist Church in a financial way and his service to it remain on the records. This was his hometown, his home church, and he never overlooked them in his success.

In 1898 the United States went to war with Spain. In midsummer Captain Baker ran the blockade, sailing from Jamaica to Santiago, to carry foodstuffs to the U.S. Navy ships there. Newspapermen on board a vessel later showed their appreciation for foodstuffs carried to

A Rich to Remember (continued)

them by Lorenzo with an award from the Newspaper Artists Association, and newspapers nation-wide carried a picture of him holding a cornucopia overflowing with fruit.

The Boston Fruit Company merged with the United Fruit Company in 1899, chartered "for the transportation of fruits from the tropics to Boston." Lorenzo became head of the Jamaica Division of the new company, also serving as a director. In 1902 United Fruit had fifty steamers operating in the trade. In 1908 it had some seventy. In 1910 the properties of the United Fruit Company had risen to \$20,000-000. In 1955 it had assets of 390 million, and in 1971, under the new name of United Brands, it had assets of \$318,500,000. These are the cold facts of the meteoric rise of the business which owes its origin to Lorenzo Dow Baker.

During the last years of his life, Lorenzo divided his time between Wellfleet, Jamaica, and Boston. In 1901 he became a trustee of Boston University, serving until his death. While at Boston he attended the First Methodist Church, serving as president of its board of trustees. Also at Boston he became a member of the Chamber of Commerce, the Marine Society, and the Exchange and Economic Club. Priding himself on his genealogical background, he became a member of the Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants.

In 1905 he reached his sixty-fifth birthday, and the people of Jamaica, in appreciation for what he had done for them, gave him a testimonial held at Kingston on March 15, in recognition of the valuable services he had rendered to the colony and the esteem in which he was held by all classes of the community. They presented him with a silver service, and the gathering included His Grace the Archbishop of the West Indies, His Excellency the Governor of Jamaica, and Army, Navy, and Civil Service representatives. The Kingston Daily Telegraph stated in its issue of March 16: "... It is fitting that the people of Jamaica should present to Captain Baker in his declining days a memento of the great work he has done for them and a token of the gratitude they feel toward him and the sentiments that are entertained by all the inhabitants of this colony, high and low, rich and poor."

In accepting the gift, Lorenzo had this to say: "I do not lay claim to anything save a wish to do something to benefit those around me. ... You wonder what the end will be. Who knows? Who can tell? You are dealing with a life-giving property; you can improve it, you have a low rate of wage, you have a people who have just come out from slavery and who are looking for improvement, and you have a clergy, teachers, ministers and merchants, and everything that a land can have; and how far you can go, and what the future may be, God Himself only knows. It is God's work. He told me so in ways that could not be mistaken. I can hardly do more, but I will say, as Laban said unto good old Jacob: 'I know that experience has taught me that God has blessed me for thy sake.'"

Martha (Hopkins) Baker, Lorenzo's wife, died on 10 August 1903. In 1908 Lorenzo went on a trip to South America and was taken ill on the steamer, which then landed at Kingston, Jamaica, where he was put ashore. He had pneumonia and complications. He seemed to rally from



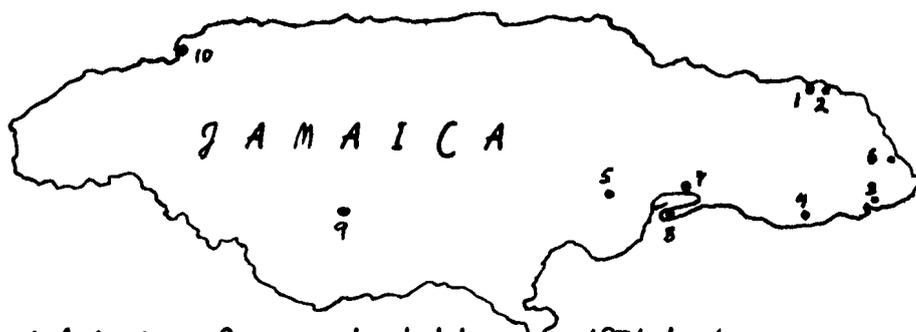
Loading Bananas, United Fruit Company, Bound Brook Wharf, Port Antonio

the original illness, but in the spring of 1908 he had a relapse. He was taken home, arriving in Boston on June 9 and taken from the steamer by ambulance, to stay some days at the Parker House before continuing on home to Wellfleet. He was in the habit of staying at the Parker House when he was in Boston, and he died there in his sleep on Sunday evening, 21 June 1908.

No person can write the proper story of Lorenzo Dow Baker without years of research. He was a sensational man. His papers are now in the hands of his grandson, Reuben Rich Baker, Jr., of Wellfleet, who, in time, may have the opportunity to catalogue and recite for us the total history of Lorenzo. Until that time, only feeble efforts like this can be made.

This prayer, stated by Lorenzo at the ceremonies at Kingston, Jamaica, at the celebration of his sixty-fifth birthday, best shows what type of man he was:

"I would do this: I would write the name - I do not know how long I will be in this world - 'Mizpah - God watch between me and thee' - with a pen of gold, that I may not forget, that you may not forget, that we may not forget."



1. Port Antonio - Bananas loaded here in 1871 by Lorenzo.
2. Cold Harbor - Now Frenchman's Cove.
3. Port Morant - Where Lorenzo first landed in 1870. Nearby he bought the Bowden estate.. Lorenzo Baker, Jr. managed this plantation for many years. Loaded the first bananas here.
4. Belvedere Estate
5. Hyde Estate - (Citrus plantation.
6. Holland Bay - Named for Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, beheaded 1649.
7. Kingston - the capital of Jamaica.
8. Port Royal - Connected with Richard Rich, (1) mariner. Blown into the sea in earthquake 1692.
9. Mandeville - Named for descendants of Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, who was Governor Manchester in 1814.
10. Montego Bay

Map Showing Points of Interest in Captain Baker's Life in Jamaica

Here Lorenzo quotes from the Bible, Genesis, Chapter 31, Verses 44 to 49, and his quotation deals with a covenant between Laban and Jacob in which a heap of stones was gathered as a witness, and the passage is used to signify remembrance; Lorenzo in his quotation above pledges to the people of Jamaica he will not forget them and wishes them to covenant that they will not forget him - and he compares his promise with the covenant made between Laban and Jacob. This use of this beautiful Bible covenant shows the depth of the character of Lorenzo Dow Baker, our "Rich to Remember."

- Julia Rich Hogan

Credits: Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Rich Baker, Jr., Wellfleet  
Boston University Special Collection  
National Cyclopedia of American Biography  
Bostonia: Volume VI, No. 1; Oct 1908, Volume IX, No. 3;  
January, 1902, Volume II, No. 4  
Twenty-sixth Annual Report of President, Boston University  
Zion's Herald, Volume LXXXVI, No. 26  
The United Fruit Co. in Latin America, by Stacy May and Galo Plaza  
Tropic Gold, by Charles Foster Batchelder, Jr.

NOTE: See pages 20 and 21 in this issue for the Ancestor Table for Captain Baker's son, Reuben Rich Baker, which includes both the Baker and Hopkins lines.