

Captor Donates to Baker's Relief

(Ed. Note: This is the second of a series of three articles on John Earl Baker, 72, a former Eagle resident, who returned from Formosa in January. The first two articles deal with his life and the third tells his views on the present China situation.)

Synopsis: Baker was born on a farm near Eagle on the road to Little Prairie. He attended the Ward school, White-water Normal school, and the University of Wisconsin.

In 1905 he met his wife, a Georgia peach, in Waukesha. They were married in 1908. In 1910 Baker "went railroading." In 1916 the Chinese government hired him to unify the Chinese railroad system.

In 1920 he administered relief during a drought in China, doling out rations to persons working on railroad and motor road relief projects. He thus built the first 850 miles of motor roads in China.

When the Chinese paymaster got behind, Mr. and Mrs. Baker and their three children returned home for a vacation in 1926.

BY GENE DIVINE
Freeman Staff

In 1928 and 1929 there were again famine conditions in China. A New York China relief group had heard of Baker and they persuaded him to return to China and administer relief. The job done, the Bakers returned to the States.

In 1930 Baker took on a job in communications for the Chinese government similar to the one he had done on railroads. He worked for Sun Fo, the son of Sun Yat-Sen, founder of the Chinese republic.

UPON ARRIVAL. "I was practically met at the pier by the Chinese government. They had another relief job for me to do." This time Baker doled out relief funds for road repair work.

"On the way to Outer Mongolia I was shot at several times," he recalls. He would travel with truck loads of food issuing it for work done.

Far from the seat of the Chinese government he was captured by bandits. "I ignored the fact that I was a captive and acted like an invited guest. I took the truck and gave the bandit chief a ride.

It turned out that he was an ex-wheelbarrow coolie who knew what roads needed repair. When he saw how I worked my relief system, he donated \$50 to relief.

"My truck driver complained that \$14 of the money had been stolen from him the night before." But to avoid any unpleasantness Baker turned the money over to a local missionary orphanage.

BEFORE THE BAKERS could return to the U. S., the Yangtze river flooded, making thousands of persons destitute and running miles of dikes. At the time the United States government was involved in the question of how to dispose of huge depression crop surpluses.

There was talk of dumping wheat in the ocean. Baker called one of his few press conferences. He suggested that the Chinese could buy the wheat and keep people alive while rebuilding the dikes.

The story hit the Sunday papers and several New York ministers gave sermons on the subject. The following Wednesday the Chinese finance minister called Baker in and by Friday night he was one of five trustees administering the project.

"This is a fine example of the remarkable organization the Chinese government was capable of in those days. In three short days a multi-million dollar program was passed by the legislature and established in operating form," Baker says.

BAKER CALLS the episode an "interesting year's work." He doled out 15 million bushels of wheat which the Chinese government paid the U. S. for in full. In addition Baker supervised the re-building of 5,000 miles of dikes along the river.

"In five months enough dirt was moved to make a wall just

under seven feet wide and seven feet high, completely around the world at the equator," Baker claims. During the peak of the operation 500,000 men a day were throwing dirt.

The cost was 20 million United States dollars. It took Baker two more years of accounting to complete the operation. At one time he had two million dollars unaccounted for other than that it was being used for relief.

"I only lost \$5,000 during the entire operation," he boasts. "I figured the results were important rather than a fool proof system to keep petty officials from squeezing a little money for themselves." Much of the \$5,000 was recovered.

IN 1934 AND 1935 Baker worked on a wheat loan for the U. S. which was used to start the air arm of the Chinese army and build more roads. In 1936 he returned home long enough to get a doctor's degree at the University of Wisconsin.

A short time later he returned to China to look after American funds of the New York relief group. By this time the fund was known as war relief and had become an annual affair.

After 1939 Mrs. Baker remained at home as did their two girls and one son. After the war relief job Baker worked for the Red Cross in China. Then in 1941 the Chinese government hired him to keep traffic moving over the Burma road.

By then the only means of transportation into China was the Burma road or through

smugglers. When the Japs took over Baker came home in 1942. From then until 1945 he served as a consultant to various Washington agencies.

IN 1945 HE WAS a consultant to the United Nations relief and rehabilitation administration. "I didn't like that set up. They wanted to bring China up to date overnight." He wrote a report on the activity for the U. S. senate.

In 1946 Baker retired. In 1948 he went to China as the American member of a joint U. S.-China commission on rural reconstruction. He was appointed to the post by President Truman.

After a couple of months at Nanking he was forced to flee to Canton. Nine months later he went still further into west China. Then he was forced to flee to Formosa.

"I had begun to pride myself on knowing when to get out, but I almost cut it too close on that

trip I was on the last plane to leave China and it was a week late," Baker recalls.

HE REMAINED in Formosa until January of this year. His job was to OK the spending of funds to improve the farmer's lot. Technical advisors would check various plans and present them in completed form to the commission which would pass on them.

Baker is a little piqued about his latest return home. "Washington said I was getting too old," he snorts. At present Baker is visiting his three sisters in Eagle.

Mrs. Baker is visiting her family in Thomasville. Baker's sisters are Mrs. Aurel Pardee, Eagle; Mrs. Lenna Hulce, White-water, and Miss Alice Baker, Eagle.

He will return to his home in Mill Valley, Calif., "to retire, I suppose," after several weeks here.