

John Earl Baker's Career of Aid to Mankind Recalled

By LOUIS W. BRIDGMAN

Back in the 1930s it was reported in the American magazine, in an illustrated article by Frazier Hunt, that a distinguished University of Wisconsin graduate of 1906, John Earl Baker, was one of two men whom the Chinese people held as examples for their children. The other, coincidentally, also had been a Wisconsin student—Charles A. Lindbergh.

The death of Mr. Baker in 1957 serves to recall that notable life-work—a demonstration of talents evolving from a brilliant academic training on a campus that drew his devotion through a long lifetime of dedicated service to his fellowmen in a foreign land.

The magazine's tribute sprang from monumental labors in administering flood and famine relief to stricken Chinese regions, and in building a vast public works program with native labor and the distribution of great stores of supplies. For using revolutionary methods successfully on a grand scale in relieving national distress, the Chinese government decorated Wisconsin's Baker with an award seldom conferred on foreigners—the Order of the Bountiful Harvest, and also with



John Earl Baker

the Order of the Brilliant Jade.

Baker's first ministry to the Chinese government was as adviser on railway administration, responsible for modernizing the country's railways. He went to China in 1916. When famine swept China's vast areas in 1931, unparalleled devastation swept the ancient empire. Given the task of directing relief, Baker bought, initially, 15 million bushels of American wheat and put the starv-

ing millions to work. He accompanied Col. and Mrs. Lindbergh on flights over the flooded areas, pointing out districts most in need of relief. Two million men were employed on roads, canals, dikes and wells, and he paid them with goods instead of money.

Twelve million Chinese starved to death, but Baker and the Red Cross saved several other millions from a similar fate. And while they were thus saved, China was realizing for the first time her dreams of vast internal improvements. Baker himself took great pride in this result for China, for it demonstrated the value and practicability of work relief without encouraging pauperism. Out of it came also a vast expansion of the co-operative movement in China.

For his work in famine relief Baker became known as the "Hoover of China."

On a trip over one of the new highways he had built, Baker found a striking metamorphosis in the spirit of the people.

"I could have sworn," he wrote to Madison friends, "that a different population had moved in; people whose heads were up and who looked me in the eye."

He directed the building of the first thousand miles of modern motor roads in China, making possible driving from Shanghai to any province south of the Yangtze River.

In 1934 Baker headed the Wheat Syndicate, set up to handle Finance Minister T. V. Soong's \$50 million cotton-wheat loan. Extensive work of preventive nature continued. From foundations thus built, Chinese leaders carried on. Also noteworthy was his work, under Gen. Chiang Kai-shek, as inspector general of the supervisory commission on the Burma Highway, designed to assure passage of war materials and Red Cross supplies through the Burma Road. His last service was on the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction on Formosa, under appointment by President Truman.

A native of Eagle, Wis., Baker received the bachelor's degree at the University in 1906 and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He received the master's degree in 1908 and later the doctorate in economics, and in 1936 he was awarded the honorary Doctor of Laws. A sister, Alice, was graduated here in 1911, and a son, John, in 1940. Mrs. R. R. Crosby, 2207 Fox Ave., and Milo K. Swanton, Route 4, are cousins.

Baker's academic career was one of brilliant promise from the start, to be largely fulfilled. A member of Athena, pioneer debating society, he participated in the famed Joint Debate, arguing the affirmative on compulsory workmen's insurance against industrial accidents. And in the Intercollegiate Debate in 1905, against Nebraska, on a somewhat similar question, he and his colleagues argued on the negative and winning side.

Baker's last campus appearance was in June, 1956, when he attended his class reunion and was inducted into the University's selective Half-Century Club. Then he returned to spend the last year of an all too short retirement at his sightly home at Mill Valley, Calif., the sunny surroundings where he was to receive rich compensations in memories of an illustrious lifetime service in the cause of needy human kind.

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