

Some Barker Family History

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Running over a list of Immigrants to America before the year 1750, published by the Institute of American Genealogy, I find the names of seventy-three Barkers. Through *Barker Genealogy*, published by the Barker Society, of which I am a vice-president,¹ I learn there are eight principal lines of the Barker family in this country. Miss E. Frye Barker is the Secretary of the Barker Society. My people in this country originate from James Barker of Rowley, Massachusetts. He was born in Straagewell, County of Suffolk, England, in the year 1618, and died at Rowley, Massachusetts, September 5, 1678. He came from England with his brother Thomas, in the company of the Reverend Ezekiel Rogers, and landed at Salem, Massachusetts, in the year 1638. He was a tailor, and, in 1639, one of the founders of Rowley, and one of its first tything-men. I have made no effort to find the origin of our family name, and as it probably antedates the sideshow spieler (or "barker") I assume the original Barker removed the bark from oak and hemlock trees which was used for tanning hides. The coat of arms used on the Barker Society stationery is a shield surmounted by a falcon, with the motto, *In Deo Solo Salus*.

Leaving a hiatus here of one hundred thirty-nine years, which I know will be appreciated, I shall pass up the gay cavaliers and bold buccaneers who married, were knighted or hung in the succeeding generations, and come down to Samuel Barker the ancestor of the Indiana branch of my family. He fought in the revolutionary war in Captain Rogers' company and married Betsy Rogers, the daughter of the Captain. He lived at Newburyport, Massachusetts, and his sons were Moses, who died in early life, Nathaniel, Francis William Rogers and Samuel Barker. My grandfather William Rogers Barker, fought in the war of 1812 in the company of Captain Joseph Holt of the State of Maine. On March 27, 1817, he (William Rogers Barker) married Anna Maria Johnson of Charleston, South Carolina, and engaged

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in business in that city. That he was a prosperous man of business is evidenced by his ownership of five or six slaves who were used as house servants. He was a member of the Charleston Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, and I have his lambskin apron and officer's jewel.

The Nat Turner Insurrection in Virginia of the year 1831, was possibly influential in causing him to leave Charleston at this time as there was a general feeling of unrest among the slaves, and a corresponding uneasiness on the part of the slave owners who lived in constant dread of an uprising. My grandfather, not wishing to rear his family in a slave state, removed to Philadelphia, then to Cincinnati, where he engaged in the mercantile business. His business was wrecked in 1832, and he moved from Cincinnati to Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Later he moved on to Vanderburgh County, where he settled on a quarter section in the Lower Bayou, ten miles below Evansville. There he engaged in farming and flat-boating farm produce and live-stock to New Orleans, in which business he was quite successful. Before the end of 1832, he bought the first lot sold by Abner Luce in the new town of Newburgh. Whether or not this lot was bought with the intention of making his home in the town is not known. His widow, who was the executrix of the estate, sold the lot in the year 1844. He was commissioner of Vanderburgh County for several terms. He (William Rogers Barker) died on July 19, 1837, when about sixty-one years of age. His widow, Anna Maria, died on July 24, 1851. Their children were: William Luther Barker (my father), Elizabeth Ann, Thomas Rogers, Saphronia, Matilda Smith, John Wesley, Harriet Newell and James Osgood Andrews. After the death of their father the two older brothers, William L. and Samuel, then aged nineteen and seventeen years, respectively, attempted to continue the flat-boat business, but after a few trips gave it up. On one of these trips to New Orleans, one evening when they were getting ready to tie up for the night, at Bayou la Fourche, Samuel took the skiff and ran out ahead of the boat with the tow line which he wound around a tree. As the boat drew the line taut and came to a stop, a Spaniard rushed up to Samuel flourishing a big knife in his face and excitedly abusing him in Spanish. Uncle Samuel was badly frightened until my father yelled at the Spaniard:

"You touch that boy and I'll blow your head off." There he stood on the boat with the big rifle that they always carried, ready to make good his threat. The Spaniard left with much muttering and angry gesturing. Then my father asked Samuel to throw off the rope, as the mulberry tree to which he had lashed the boat was regarded by Spaniards as a sacred tree.

Samuel Barker remained on the farm and kept the family together. He was successful and added many acres to the original landholdings. He was a Methodist and was several times elected on the Republican ticket to the office of County Commissioner of Vanderburgh County. Barker Avenue in Evansville was named in his honor. His wife's maiden name was Mary King. She was of one of the old families in the Lower Bayou. Their children were Francis A. and Anna. Anna married a Doctor Bell and died leaving two sons, namely Robert and Samuel. The latter was in recent years the Auditor of Vanderburgh County. Francis A., the son of Samuel Barker, is a millionaire resident of Santa Monica, California. He still owns (1932) the Old Bayou farm at Barker's landing where the old-time steamboats took on the cordwood that the boys chopped and exchanged for wheat flour in order that the family could have white bread on Sundays. The old Barker farmhouse, built in 1832, is still standing with the high-water marks of the Ohio for each flood year notched on the stairway bannister. High water meant an overflow and a move up stairs for the family in the house and the livestock in the barn. Communication between the house and barn, and with Henderson, Kentucky, was by skiff. The receding waters always left a deposit of sand and mud on the lower floors and an accumulation of driftwood on the farm lands.

My cousin Francis has two daughters, Mabel and Frances. In conversation with my uncle Samuel, after the death of my father, he spoke of his mother as a city-bred, southern lady. The snakes, lizards, spiders and thousand-legged worms incident to her new home in the wilds of the Lower Bayou, were a constant terror to her. In my boyhood home, we had some china jars of about one gallon capacity. My father said that his mother's brothers were sea captains and that they brought these jars filled with preserves to his mother from China. I have some of grand-

mother Barker's silver spoons and a china compote, or fruit dish. I regret that I did not get the silhouette profiles of my grandparents, which I have seen, but which now seem to have been misplaced or destroyed.

My father, William Luther Barker, the oldest son of William Rogers Barker, studied medicine with a Doctor Walker of Evansville and attended the Kentucky School of Medicine at Louisville. Doctor Casselberry of Evansville was one of his fellow students. My father located in Boonville for the practice of medicine in April, 1846. His early practice covered territory with a radius of fifteen to twenty miles about this village and his professional visits were usually made on horseback over bridle-paths leading from the main roads. He was a charter member of the Mason, Oddfellows, and Knights of Pythias lodges of Boonville, and regimental surgeon of the One Hundred Twentieth Regiment of Indiana volunteers with the rank of Major in the Civil War. His horse fell with him at Atlanta, causing a rupture and necessitating his retirement from the service. He was an old-line Whig, then a staunch Republican at a time when that party was largely in the minority in his vicinity. He was drafted by his party to fill up the ticket at times, and although he ran far ahead of his party ticket, he was twice defeated for state representative and once for state senator. He was not a hidebound Republican as he voted for his friends among all classes, and his attachments were not controlled by political, social or religious ties. At various times, he was a member of the board of town trustees of Boonville. He married Mary J. Williams, a native of Pennsylvania, in the year 1847. He died in 1883. His widow (my mother) survived him twenty-two years. Their eldest child (my sister), Katie E. Barker, married Zachary T. Brackenridge in the year 1872. Mr. Brackenridge was a practicing attorney of Boonville, and the nephew of John A. Brackenridge, a famous lawyer. Katie's husband died in the year 1874, and in 1878 she married John L. Taylor, another lawyer. She died in the year 1908, leaving no children.

I was the only son² of Doctor William Luther Barker. My business career began back in 1870 with a clerkship in the grocery store of Johnson & Brackenridge in Boonville. The members of this firm were Doctor Thomas J. Johnson and

² William Luther Barker, Jr.

John A. Brackenridge. Zachary T. Brackenridge, my brother-in-law, and John A. Brackenridge were the sons of Thomas J. Brackenridge, who was a son of the Reverend John Brackenridge of Washington, D. C. The father of the late Senator Hemenway kept the post office in the rear of the grocery store. A year or two after I became a grocery clerk, I was employed by the Boonville Banking Company, of which my father was president, and later I worked for its successor, the Boonville National Bank. I served nine years in both, in all. During the following years until 1895, my business was in real estate, insurance and abstracts of title. In the latter year, I organized the People's Bank of Boonville, and was its president for eighteen years. Since 1914, my business has been that of an abstractor of titles. The work involves a combination of local history and real estate law which I enjoy, and I can take a vacation at any time that I wish. My political activities have been limited to a term or two as town treasurer, some fifty years ago, and the chairmanship of the Republican County Executive Committee during the years 1894 and 1895.

Boonville's first daily newspaper, *The Daily Newsboy*, was printed at the *Standard* office in 1876. James A. Hemenway was the business manager and tramped off the daily issue on the old Gordon press. I was the editor-in-chief and type-setter. We worked hard night and day for the seventy-five dollars our week's work netted the business, and some of our advertisers still owe us. After his return from Kansas in 1882, Hemenway was employed in helping me compile my set of abstract books, then he was deputy county Auditor under Union Bethel for a time. Still later, he went into the law office of my brother-in-law and became his partner. His political career began with his election as prosecuting attorney of the local judicial circuit, in the year 1886.

As a "joiner" I have done fairly well. The Masonic order was my first venture in fraternal societies. This was in the year 1878, and I have received all the degrees of ancient York-rite Masonry, and have been duly elected to preside as worshipful master of the Blue Lodge and high priest of the chapter of Royal Arch Masons. I am also the representative of the Grand Lodge of Nova Scotia near the Grand Lodge of Indiana. The local Knights of Pythias chapter was always on a boom or in a depression, and I have presided as

Chancellor Commander under both conditions. I enjoy the good fellowship of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, but have never held office in this lodge. The chairmanship of the Warrick County Centennial Celebration came to me in 1916, and, with a good organization of helpers, we put on a very creditable pageant and an exhibit of old relics. Other civic activities include membership in the Sons of Veterans, Indiana Historical Society, Warrick County Historical Society, Southwestern Indiana Historical Society, Kiwanis Club, Chamber of Commerce, the Boonville Press Club, Warrick County Bar Association, Historian of the Southwestern Indiana Civic Association, and vice-president of the Barker Society. I have experienced the hopes, joys and disappointments of a mine owner in Nevada; cleared off the sagebrush, "fresnoed," irrigated and "rabbit-fenced" a ranch in Idaho. I have ridden horseback with the forest rangers in Colorado, spent a summer in the Great Smoky mountains of East Tennessee, bathed in both the Atlantic and the Pacific and in Great Salt Lake of Utah. I have hunted and fished in Minnesota, motored around Lake Michigan and through the Ozark country of Missouri and Arkansas. Now, in retrospect, it would appear that my long life has been one of unusual activity, but I do not feel that way. This is because I know there has been much time and effort wasted in the sixty-two years, and that little has been accomplished.

In the year 1883, I was married to Ada E. Dailey who departed this life in 1890, leaving two sons, William L. and John Dailey Barker. William L. is a graduate of Purdue University and has been employed in the United States Forest Service for about twenty years. He is now (1932) stationed at Duluth, Minnesota. He is married and has two daughters, Mary Lou and Jeanne Lois.

John D. Barker, my other son, is unmarried. He continued the military history of the family by getting a leave of absence from his position as Treasurer of the Peoples Trust & Savings Bank of Boonville while he served in the United States navy from June, 1917, to February, 1919. He is a graduate of Purdue University in electrical engineering, and is now Secretary of the Peoples Trust & Savings Bank and a member of the New York consistory of Scottish Rite Masons.

The five sons of my grandfather, William Rogers Barker,

have all passed on, leaving two of the next generation, my cousin Francis Barker and myself, surviving, both now old men. Two great-grandsons, of William Rogers Barker, my sons just mentioned, now past middle age, are probably the terminals of my Barker family line after nearly three hundred years. A modern calculation gives the chance for a man's sons having sons of their own as one in eight, so I conclude we have done well enough to have survived three centuries on this continent.