

A Tarnished Legacy: George Fisher Baker, U.S. Steel, Convict Leasing and Columbia Athletics

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Columbia University & Slavery Course

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Columbia University's Baker Athletics Complex lies near the banks of the Harlem River, at the northwest tip of Manhattan near Inwood Hill Park. The Complex's opening was marked by Baker Field's inaugural season in 1923, which marked a new era for Columbia after its football teams played for several years at South Field on the University's Morningside Heights campus.[1] Gone were the days of temporary bleachers installed in an extremely miniscule space, and welcomed by 1928 was a three-sided, 35,000-seat stadium, fit for a school that aspired to high-level athletics.[2] Thousands of athletes, students, faculty and community members have made the 100-block trek up to the complex to take in a litany of athletics events, and it has remained a part of the Columbia experience.

Yet, as the complex nears its 100-year anniversary of existence, little is known about the origins of the Complex as well as its proposal and construction. Today, a brief summary on Columbia's Athletics website outlines the history of Baker Athletics Complex. The 235-word article alludes to a 700,000-dollar purchase on behalf of the University by George Fisher Baker, a "financier," on December 30, 1921.[3] The article does not expand, however, on the history surrounding this acquisition.

Born in 1840 in Troy, New York, George Fisher Baker died one of the wealthiest men in the United States in 1931. According to the *New York Times*, which published two separate articles when news broke of his death, Baker was estimated to have built a fortune of nearly 500 million dollars which would have made him the third-richest person in the world in 1931.[4] The modern equivalent of 500 million dollars today is 8.3 billion dollars.[5] Praised in numerous articles published throughout his life as a brilliant investor, Baker accrued a majority of his wealth through investments in stocks in the early twentieth century. Lauded as extremely private, Baker proved himself as a very savvy businessman.[6] In addition, Baker possessed little connection to Columbia other than the purchase of the land upon which the University constructed its Athletics Complex. His generosity, particularly toward institutions of higher education, including Columbia, is extensively documented in his estate papers. In addition to his charity work, as a longtime resident of New York City, Baker stayed active in numerous financial conglomerates.

One such company was United States Steel as Baker served as a director on the company's financial board alongside J.P. Morgan and a few others since the inception of the company in 1901.[7] Morgan played a leading role in the merging of Andrew Carnegie's Carnegie Steel Company and William Henry Moore's National Steel Company to create U.S. Steel, a massive enterprise that eventually became one of the largest producers of steel globally.[8] Morgan chose to involve his close friend, Baker, in the project perhaps seeking Baker's financial expertise and influence.

According to journalist Douglas Blackmon's 2008 Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, U.S. Steel was among the largest users of convict leasing which he calls "slavery by another name." [9] Blackmon asserts that the "millions of tons of coal brought to the surface..." by convict laborers who were occasionally worked to death was "essential to U.S. Steel's production of iron." [10] Through U.S. Steel's acquisition of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, it was able to operate seamlessly in the South, accruing millions of dollars in profit off the backs of forced labor. [11] Although Baker is not mentioned by name in Blackmon's book, Baker figured prominently into

U.S. Steel's leadership group, and as a result, made significant financial and personal investment in the company. It was, therefore, in Baker's best interest that U.S. Steel reached substantial profit margins.

This paper poses the problem that Baker Athletics Complex is named after, and was financed by a former director of United States Steel, who profited immensely from this exploitative labor, particularly convict leasing. This paper will look to explore how Baker's name ended up on Columbia's athletics facility, and why the Dyckman tract was chosen as the site for its construction. This paper will then attempt to build a narrative of Baker's personal life by analyzing his expansive investment portfolio, as well as providing insight into his personal affairs, and looking into property owned by his family and estate. Finally, this paper will return to Blackmon in its conclusion, in order to expand his discussion of a system of exploitative labor that is both criminally understudied by historians and certainly deserving of more scrutiny.

Home field advantage?

Before Columbia made the move to Morningside Heights, various recreational facilities were explored, but athletics had not yet gained the money necessary to allocate funding of a stadium. The University was also still preoccupied with the process of finalizing its permanent move to Morningside Heights, and had plenty of other concerns to prioritize. But with football's sudden rise in popularity, athletics quickly became a pressing concern to University officials.

According to historian and longtime Barnard professor Robert McCaughey, who wrote *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004* published in 2003, "a temporary rise to athletic prowess and the invention of a distinctive undergraduate curriculum... defined the interwar period" of the University.[12] This "rise to athletic prowess" was due in part to the fact that Columbia banned football for a period of 10 years from 1905-1915 as the game was deemed too violent by then-President Nicholas Murray Butler.[13] Lacking a dedicated facility for gameplay in New York City, where space was anything but ample, further compounded this issue. After

some rule changes made football safer relative to the older version, Butler reinstated football on a five-year temporary basis in 1915, with the Lions returning to the gridiron a year later. One condition for the restoration of football included that the team would temporarily play its games on college grounds.[14] This meant that South Field with temporary wooden stands adorning the sidelines served as football's new home field after the team had played its games in various off-campus locations prior to 1915 including Brotherhood Baseball Park, the Polo Grounds, the Berkeley Oval, and American League Park, which once housed the New York Yankees.[15] Once the war ended, Butler decided that the University should pursue an athletic stadium. He sought a venue where a majority of Columbia alumni could return to campus and watch the team compete as the game's popularity grew and the setup at South Field became unfeasible for a growing fanbase.[16]

The first real viable location for a Columbia stadium was a facility that was to be built directly atop the Hudson River from 116th to 120th streets alongside Riverside Park. According to a 1921 New York Times article, the stadium was first proposed by alumnus D. Leroy Dresser of the class of 1889.[17] Prior to football being banned, the University discussed this project, getting the plans approved by the City, and securing the funding from an investor from San Francisco.[18] However, the San Francisco Earthquake in April of 1906 dented this anonymous investor's fortune to the point that the project no longer became viable. It would be soon revisited, however.

Just months after the San Francisco donor backed out, a November 1906 memorandum written by Butler "in relation to the policy to be pursued by Columbia toward athletic sports and intercollegiate contests," outlined the need for funding. Butler argued that a "project for a University Stadium, with ample accommodations for all forms of outdoor sport" could provide a "convenient and as well-arranged an exercising ground as can be found anywhere..." for students.[19] Nowhere to be found in this memo, however, was a reference to the stadium's primary use being football, instead Butler referred to it serving "all forms of outdoor sport." [20]

Ten years later, Butler permanently reinstated football, but there remained a shortage in funding for the stadium. The Committee of Student Organizations, which

comprised of faculty that oversaw student affairs, received a letter from Butler in 1919 asking for advice on whether the temporary restrictions on football—including the limiting of its games to on-campus venues—should be lifted.[21] As Butler wrote in the letter, he sought the perspective of this committee as a representation of students' perspective, and would take their recommendations into careful consideration. The committee recommended that football be restored on a permanent basis. But it also advised the University to explore playing a few games a year at bigger venues in New York City, to support larger crowds, underscoring the idea that football's popularity was soaring once again. Ultimately, the committee's sentiment would be shared by Butler, who soon created a Stadium Committee in 1920 to explore the possibility of a venue that avoided the generally costly fees of renting out professional stadiums with the primary focus of serving as a football venue.

In October of 1919, Butler wrote to Frank Fackenthal, who was the chairman of the University Committee on Student Organizations. In the letter, Butler asserted that the “speedy completion [of] our long delayed (sic) plans for the Hudson River Stadium” should be the next item of attention for the committee.[22] At the annual dinner Varsity “C” Club—an alumni network for current and former athletes of Columbia—meeting and dinner in December of 1920, Butler spoke to nearly 100 guests about this urgency, and a plan to erect a memorial to soldiers that fought in World War I in addition to a stadium, “The time has come when there should be a definite organized movement to carry forward to completion the project for a stadium, as first projected in 1906. This stadium, together with an adjoining Water Gate and Landing Stage on the south, would make a notable memorial to the soldiers and sailors of New York who gave their lives in the great war...”[23] Thus, Butler likely chose to propose a memorial in the aftermath of the war in part to draw on national pride, and perhaps in an effort to lure an investor tied to the military.

Aside from the memorial, the benefits of the proposed location had many practical benefits. First, the facility was an extremely short distance away from main campus, meaning that it would be highly accessible—both for athletes and students. Second, Columbia would have been building a stadium that did not infringe on any

established property, though there is little indication that this was ever a concern of any trustees at the time. Third, the committee's recommendations that games be played on campus would be technically fulfilled, allowing athletics and campus life to coexist rather fluidly, while upholding Butler's conditions.

But this plan for the joint stadium-memorial fell apart rather quickly, due mostly to the astronomical cost of constructing the proposed facility. If the cost of renting out professional stadiums was high, the price of building a stadium on top of a river was certainly higher. An additional concern was the lack of space available for other athletic courts, including baseball and tennis stadiums.[24] Columbia simply could not afford the price it would have cost to build the proposed facility and scrapped the plans nearly as quickly as they were created. In desperate search of a location that would give the Lions a suitable home stadium, and provide an end to an issue described as "an extremely serious drawback to athletics at Columbia," Butler and the Committee returned to the drawing board.[25]

Enter Dyckman Tract, Exist Hudson River

The answer came in the form of an 26-acre plot located between 218th street, Broadway and the old Harlem Ship Canal, described in a summary of the proceedings created by Virginia Xanthos, coordinator of special projects in 1984 as "hilly with rock out-croppings at various places... contains some pine trees, a huge pile of rock on the spoil left by the excavation of the Harlem River Ship Canal and an old mansion, the home of the former owners." [26] It is unclear who discovered this land, but once it was brought to the committee, the decision to dismiss the Hudson River project became wholly obvious, as Xanthos notes that discussions moved rather quickly.[27] In the span of about four months, the members of the Stadium Committee met to create the plans for an expansive athletic facility, finishing by October of 1921. Just 10 months after Butler's remarks praising the Hudson River plan, an alumni news article titled "Stadium Committee Approves Tentative Plans," informed the public that the new location was the sole focus of Butler and the Committee.[28] The plans, created by two Columbia alumni, Henry Hornbostel and Eugene Klapp, called for a football field, baseball field,

running track, tennis courts, a boat house and a club house.[29] This represented a significantly more efficient use of space and proved a more suitable option for an ever-expanding athletic department. At last, a feasible plan seemed to be within reach.

The fervent optimism of Butler and the Committee was met with the harsh reality that Columbia still lacked the funds to construct the proposed stadium. Before the University could fathom the beginning of construction on the stadium, it had to purchase the land from the city. The history of this land extends beyond the bounds of this paper. In brief, the City slowly acquired the land from a group of wealthy financiers who had retreat homes located on various portions of the land. By 1922, the City had purchased a majority of what comprises Fort Tryon Park and Inwood Hill Park today. Columbia hoped that the City would consider selling the land so that an athletics facility could be constructed. Likely sensing the ability to make a profit, the City placed an “option” on the land that was good until noon on December 31, 1921.[30] The “option” would allow Columbia to search for the funding until that date, giving Butler about six months to secure the nearly three-quarter of a million dollars necessary to claim the land for the University. While Butler was certainly familiar with the University’s lack of funding, he was in a decidedly different position this time around. A proposed all-purpose facility, rather than just a football stadium, seemed more attractive to potential donors, and Butler went to work, attempting to leverage his connections to secure the funding necessary to acquire the land and eventually build the stadium. The clock was ticking, and Butler would need last every second afforded to him.

In Search of a Donor

Demonstrating Butler’s confidence in the Dyckman tract project, Butler reached out to his close friend and Columbia University Trustee, A.B. Hepburn, on June 3, 1921 in anticipation of the Committee’s approval of the new proposal. Hepburn was a well-connected New York City politician, who served on the boards of many banks—most notably as head of the board of trustees of Chase Bank—and certainly had rich friends including George Fisher Baker.[31] Butler’s initial contacts with Hepburn acknowledged that Hepburn’s connections could aid Butler in his quest to secure the funding. The

three-page letter, typed on official University letterhead, urges Hepburn to pique the interest of Baker in funding the facility, as Butler predicts that the option will “require about 700,000 dollars or possibly 750,000 dollars... including interest, taxes and a fair sum to put the property in readiness for development.”[32] The tone of the letter suggests prior correspondence between Hepburn and Butler and a familiarity of the relationship between Hepburn and Baker, as Butler writes, “Might not Mr. Baker like to have this great tract bear his name and contribute for all time to the health, outdoor exercise, and enjoyment of tens of thousands of young Americans?... This might just hit Mr. Baker’s fancy.”[33] While Butler seemed confident in his tone, there still appears to be a slight sense of desperation with the insistent please. Then again, Butler had seen stadium plans fall apart over and over again during his tenure. He needed the money.

A second letter, written from Butler to Hepburn on October 25, 1921, described in more details the benefits of the facility to the community at large, in addition to Columbia. Perhaps this shift in tone was indicative of an effort to secure the purchase based on the potential impact the facility could have on New York City as a whole, rather than just Columbia. In the four months separating the letters, Butler notes that Baker had recently donated a large sum to Cornell, and hoped that the wealthy financier would consider a similar gift to Columbia. While Butler certainly would have been satisfied with any single donor, “...the Smith, the Brown, or the Jones Playing Fields, or Athletic Grounds...” he hoped that Hepburn would give an answer as to whether Baker seemed interested.[34]

Two days later, Butler and Hepburn met for dinner. The next day, Hepburn wrote Butler a response which clearly outlined a perceived interest from Baker in the project, “He [Baker] fails to appreciate or settle upon any purely educational matter, and this being sporting as well as educational, it might appeal to help. I should think it would.”[35] Hepburn continued that Baker had “often expressed to me a desire to do something for the town in which he had lived and in which he had been so successful,” perhaps verifying that the New York City angle could draw in Baker.

In the two months that transpired, it is unclear whether Butler corresponded with Baker. The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library Archives possesses an expansive

collection of Butler's letters as part of the Nicholas Murray Butler papers, including some sent between George Fisher Baker, Jr., and Butler, but no evidence of correspondence was immediately available. Furthermore, the Baker Library Special Collection Archives did not have any records of correspondence between Butler and Baker, and did not have any documents identifying why Baker ultimately decided to pony up the money. Just hours before the noon deadline on December 31st, Baker chose to parlay 700,000 dollars to the City, effectively ensuring that Columbia would construct its Athletics facility.[36] At last, after years of agonizing persistence, Butler secured the funds necessary to build an Athletics complex. Perhaps Baker Field had a nice ring to it, anyways.

Baker remains anonymous

When Baker made the decision to commit the money to fund Columbia's athletics facility, his name was initially kept secret. Thus, when Butler announced to the public that the funding had been secured due to the generosity of an anonymous donor, curiosity was rampant. On January 7, 1922, just one week after Baker's purchase, the *Columbia Daily Spectator* published an article in response to a Stadium Committee meeting held at the nearby University Club with the headline: "Committee Lauds Work of Butler for Stadium Fund." [37] The lede of the article referenced the 700,000 dollar donation as "the greatest achievement of President Nicholas Murray Butler's career as head of Columbia" but did not identify the donor, other than to say that the person was a "close friend of President Butler." [38] The lack of attribution given to Baker for his general gift—at least initially—was due to "[Baker's] wishes for the time being to remain anonymous." [39] While it is unknown precisely why Baker wished to be anonymous, perhaps the "Sphinx of Wall Street" yearned to stay out of the limelight.

The well-documented struggle to fund an athletic facility created plenty of cause for celebration among students, faculty and alumni who had yearned for years on end that the University could provide a world-class Athletics facility. In a letter written to President Butler on December 31, 1921, T. Ludlow Christie, a former football player and member of the Board of Trustees, offered his congratulations to the President for

“continuing the policy of including in her plan of intensive development ample provisions for furnishing opportunities for the mental, moral and physical development of our student body outside the classroom.”[40] Adding to the praise of Butler was Lester R. Watson, the chairman of the Board of Student Representatives, who in a January 1, 1922 letter to Butler said, “The student body is deeply indebted to you for your ceaseless and untiring work in this direction. It owes to you a homage of gratitude and appreciation for the effort that you have devoted towards the attainment of so happy an end.”[41] The letters of Christie and Watson epitomize the response of most of the students, faculty and alumni at the time: overwhelming joy and relief. But these same people were not aware—or at least did not express so publicly—of the identity of the donor.

The answer came soon, as news broke of the donor’s identity two weeks after the purchase was secured. On January 16, 1922, *Spectator* published an article with the headline, “The Benefactor is Known,” in which the authors noted that “it was only natural for undergraduates to imagine that it [the donation] came from a wealthy alumnus of the Blue and White who answered the call of his Alma Mater.”[42] Yet, Baker possessed no apparent connection to the University, rendering the previous assumption incorrect. Nonetheless, as the author of the *Spectator* article noted, “Especially noteworthy is the fact that Mr. Baker is not a Columbia man. When a University has attained the plane where it arouses the love not only of its students and alumni but the general public it has then achieved a distinguished service.”[43]

Four days later, an article profiling Baker in the *Columbia Alumni News*, a non-independent publication of the University that served as a quasi-public relations outlet for the University, appeared with even more insight into Baker’s background.[44] The article begins with a glowing description of Baker, “noted banker, financier and benefactor of numerous educational institutions throughout the country,” including a recent gift to Cornell. Most notably, though, the article provides a list of corporations on which he served on the directorate.[45] That included an alphabetized list of a handful of companies, the last of which was the United States Steel Corporation.[46] Still, though,

there were no quotes attributed to Baker in the article, and while some of his anonymity was relinquished, there remained little insight into what motivated this contribution.

On March 31, 1922, Eugene Klapp, an alumnus of the school of mines, and one of the two men charged with creating the initial mockups for the school's plans for the Dyckman Tract, published an article in the Alumni News as part of a handful about the Athletics Complex in an issue dedicated to the stadium. The issue was conceived by the paper's managing editor, Charles Proffitt, who wrote a letter to Trustee and Stadium Committee chairman Archibald Douglas on January 9, 1922, encouraging Trustee participation in helping to construct the issue.[47] This is where Klapp's involvement likely began, and given that he had prior knowledge of the plans, his article was written in the guise of a longform press release and likely edited by members of the Stadium Committee. Accordingly, the article heaped plenty of praise on Baker for his donation, but lacked Baker's voice, which could provide insight as to what motivated this specific gift.

Klapp's article did, though, provide a much more extended summary of the proceedings—outlined throughout this paper—and included sketches and maps of the proposed stadium, marking the first time that actual mockups were revealed to the public. Klapp notes in the article that the plans are “tentative,” in that while the funding was secured for the land itself, there were still hurdles to be climbed before construction could begin on the site itself. Finally, the article referenced a celebration that would be hosted by the “Forty-Niners” a week later on April 5th at the University Club to celebrate Baker's gift.[48] A month later, May 4th, the University planned to cancel 3 p.m. classes to commemorate the official dedication of the site, with a procession making the five-mile trip up Broadway to the field at 3:30 p.m.[49] Although the plan was delayed until the Fall due to inclement weather, the Trustees had already made the plan official. Columbia's new athletics facility was to be called “Baker Field.”[50] Baker would chip in another 125,000 dollars to specifically aid in the construction of the permanent bleachers for Baker Field in June of 1924 bringing his total contributions to Columbia to approximately \$825,000.[51] With these donations, George Fisher Baker's name became a permanent part of the University's legacy, and still remains the name of

Columbia's current athletic facility to date. Philanthropy and kindness certainly drove George Fisher Baker to give to Columbia, but whether or not there was any sort of external motivation remained to be seen.

“Who was George F. Baker?”

A June 2011 article written on the website of Harvard's Business School posed the question in its headline: “Who Was George F. Baker?”^[52] A few months earlier, the family of George Fisher Baker committed his papers to the Business School Library's Archives, named for the man who gave 5 million dollars to the school in 1924.^[53] But even after his papers were donated nearly 90 years after Baker's donation, there was still an overwhelming sense that the general public did not know who this man was.

In just five short paragraphs, the June article fittingly casts Baker in a mysterious light, noting that Baker “continued to jealously guard his near anonymity... near the end of his long distinguished career.”^[54] Even today, this sentiment of “anonymity” seems to be felt by the general public, as Baker's name does not carry the same weight as those of his peers, J.P. Morgan, Charles Schwab, Andrew Carnegie and others, all of whom are mentioned in Blackmon's book.^[55]

Although he chose to operate mostly under the radar, Baker's massive impact on the financial development of the United States in the mid to late 19th century and early 20th century earned him an obituary on the front page of the *New York Times* upon his death.^[56] Known as the “Sphinx of Wall Street,” Baker was a founding partner of First National Bank—known today as Citibank—and an active member on the board of trustees of numerous financial and philanthropic organizations for most of his life.^[57] These accolades earned Baker an exceptional reputation among his peers; in articles published in and around the 1920s in notable American publications, he was consistently referred to in passing in a positive manner.

This included the cover story, “Banker Baker” of the April 14, 1924 issue of *Time Magazine*, in which a portrait of Baker adorned the front cover of the weekly publication.^[58] The second paragraph began “‘Who is George F. Baker?’ is a question

to which no good answer has ever been given,” as if to suggest that any previous attempts at capturing intimate details Baker’s life had fallen woefully short.[59] Baker’s retort served as a critical philosophy throughout his life, “None of the public’s business!” as Baker consistently shied away from the public eye to continue his behind-the-scenes domination of Wall Street.[60] According to the article, Baker epitomized the classic “rags-to-riches” story in that he did not inherit any of his wealth from external sources.[61] Instead, Baker rose from teller to the head of First National Bank, his primary source of revenue throughout his life, and completed a rapid ascension to become one of Wall Street’s elite.

Through analysis of personal correspondence, Baker’s last will and testament and estate papers, and numerous photographs—all available at the Baker Library Special Collections Archives at the Harvard Business School—one can glean a more holistic picture of Baker the human being rather than Baker the institution.

Baker and his son, George Fisher Baker, Jr., had investments tied up in a large amount of financial institutions. According to estate papers published after his death, Baker’s estate’s third-highest stock valuation came in the form of 47,000 shares of stock in U.S. Steel valued at approximately 5.3 million dollars.[62] His son owned 25,071 shares, valued at approximately 2.8 million dollars. The modern equivalent of each of these investments totals 135.4 million dollars.[63] Since Baker served on the Board of Directors for nearly 30 years and was one of the principal investors in U.S. Steel from its inception in 1901, he possessed significant interest in the success of the companies in which he invested. His son became a director in 1922, and stepped down from the Board of Directors in 1936, according to a resignation letter penned by Baker, Jr., in June of that year.[64] Thus, Baker and his family stood to benefit significantly from the exploitative labor system outlined by Blackmon in the same manner that U.S. Steel benefited. As U.S. Steel made money, the Baker family’s fortune swelled.

In the Baker Family Papers, there are numerous photographs of Baker and his son at U.S. Steel Board of Trustees meetings, where Baker is pictured alongside the likes of J.P. Morgan and Charles Schwab, among others. In one such photograph, taken in June 1917, Baker is depicted alongside Elbert “Judge” Henry Gary, another key

founder of U.S. Steel, on an inspection trip on behalf of the company.[65] The exact nature of this inspection—including where the inspection took place is unclear. The men, counting six in total, are standing on a staircase with a train in the background. On a small, handwritten paper, a brief explanation notes that Baker's friend H.C. Frick, pictured behind Baker in the photograph, was so fond of Baker that Frick had a bust made of Baker and placed it on a pedestal in his old office.[66] It was subsequently moved to the Baker Library of the Harvard Business School after Baker's death.[67]

Throughout his life, Baker maintained personal connections with prominent American activists, investors, thinkers and even Presidents. Included in the voluminous collection of personal letters Baker sent and received were correspondences between J.P. Morgan and Theodore Roosevelt, among many others. These letters, often handwritten, showcase the tremendous respect that Baker garnered over the course of his life. In one such letter, handwritten by Booker T. Washington, Washington thanked Baker for his "generous gift" to the Tuskegee Institute in 1903.[68] In another letter written by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., on November 20th, 1912, Rockefeller praised Baker for his "important gift to medical education" toward the Cornell Medical School and medical education in New York City.[69]

According to a handwritten ledger in the Baker Family papers, Baker gave to 20 separate universities as well as 15 hospitals and medical foundations.[70] He also added five donations to World War I institutions, four to various religious institutions, and 17 New York City institutions.[71] In addition to four donations listed under the "miscellaneous" category, Baker's charitable donations totaled 22.2 million dollars, just more than four times the value of his holdings in U.S. Steel.[72] His gift to Columbia was his fifth-highest donation to any institution, as he made larger gifts to Harvard, Dartmouth, Cornell and New York University. Baker's donation to Columbia was listed in the ledger at 879,000 dollars, or the modern equivalent of 13.3 million dollars in 1922.[73] While previous reports indicated that Baker's donations totaled somewhere near 825,000 dollars, the gift was still extremely large.

Vacation Time

When Baker and his family yearned to escape the fast pace of New York City, they travelled to a few places to accomplish this desire. The first was a small weekend home in Tuxedo, New York, located approximately 30 miles north of the City, where the elder Baker spent significant time. According to the ledger of his gifts, Baker donated 315,000 dollars to Tuxedo High School, which today bears his name.[74] In his Last Will and Testament and Codicil, Baker left the home, valued at \$150,000 to his granddaughter, Florence J. Loew, and left the home's furniture to his two daughters and lone son.[75] In addition to the home in Tuxedo, Baker was a member of the highly exclusive Jekyll Island Club off the coast of Georgia, where he enjoyed frequent vacations.[76] The club was known at one point to call J.P. Morgan and many others members. According to his estate papers, Baker possessed one stock worth 1,500 dollars in the club.[77] He also wrote frequent letters on club letterhead, including three addressed to his son disseminated in 1919 and 1920.[78]

The final location where Baker and his family spent ample time away from New York City was at Horseshoe Plantation, purchased in 1916 by Baker, Jr. The plantation, located near Tallahassee, Florida, was initially owned by slaver Edward Bradford, before being transferred to numerous other owners according to Clifton Paisley's *From Cotton to Quail*. [79] In 1901, Pennsylvania's Clement A. Griscom, a prominent businessman and shipping titan, purchased the land.[80] 10 years later, in 1911, there were 80 tenant farmer families that worked to cultivate the land.[81] Five years later, once the land had switched hands to Baker, Jr., the family made frequent trips South to engage in hunting excursions, and family vacations.

While it remains unclear if the tenant farmers remained on the plantation once Baker, Jr. acquired it, a photography album in the Baker Family Papers depicts multiple images of Black workers posing for pictures in outdoor settings.[82] One such picture contains seven Black workers, with a small caption that states: "Buckhall—Making Sugar." [83] The photo pasted just below the sugar photo is of a black worker handling a plow towed by a cow, with the adjoining caption "Plowing." [84] On the next page is a

photo of upwards of twenty black men retrieving fish from nearby Lake Iamonia when the water dried up in 1939.[85] One photograph, available in the collection, depicts seventeen Black men posing on a road near the plantation. Each of their names are written with arrows pointing to the corresponding person; the same pen captioned the photo “Turkey Drive.”[86] According to the finding aid of Series II, Subseries IID, Volume 76, the albums contained photographs of “workers,” but does not offer anything more specific. However, the implications of owning land that once held a large slave plantation while simultaneously employing black workers presents an insensitivity to the land’s history of brutality.

Unpacking Baker’s complicated Legacy

During the credits of the 2012 documentary *Slavery by Another Name* based on Blackmon’s book, Blackmon provides a holistic summary of the impact of convict leasing on Afro-American populations in the South, noting that in the 80 years following the Civil War, 9,000 prisoners are known to have died while being leased as convicts.[87] As Blackmon notes in the epilogue of his book, U.S. Steel’s 1960s book commemorating the 100th anniversary of Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company “says nothing of the tens of thousands of slave workers who passed through its mines, the armies of broken miners, the hundreds buried or burned in its graveyards and ovens.”[88] Additionally, the materials examined for this paper in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library Archives and the Harvard Business School Library Archives “say nothing” of the horrors and atrocities that occurred in mines that used convict leasing. But there is no doubt that the men of U.S. Steel including George Fisher Baker profited immensely from labor that modern-day executives of U.S. Steel called ““abhorrent”” according to Blackmon.[89] While U.S. Steel could not comment to Blackmon on whether or not the company used mines that exploited convict labor, Blackmon provides compelling evidence that ties the company directly to the practice. In a similar vein, while no correspondence documented in the Baker Family Papers demonstrates any knowledge of convict leasing, Baker’s culpability for the atrocities committed should not bear on whether such knowledge can be proved or not. Given Baker’s significant

financial investment in U.S. Steel, as aforementioned and extensively documented in his family's papers, Columbia should consider that its Athletics Facility has been named for a man with deep ties to convict leasing, and a family whose legacy should be permanently thrust into question after this paper's revelations. Perhaps it is quixotic to suggest that the University would consider taking Baker's name off its Athletics Complex, but that step would mark a significant leap toward justice for the 9,000 known lives lost at the hand of "slavery by another name," whose descendants are forced to live with trauma every day.

Endnotes

- [1] Columbia Athletics, "Baker Athletics Complex," Go Columbia Lions, last modified June 5, 2018, accessed May 9, 2019, <https://gocolumbialions.com/sports/2018/6/5/319174.aspx>.
- [2] Robert McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 281.
- [3] Columbia Athletics, "Baker Athletics," Go Columbia Lions.
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