

"The Baker Family: A Story of Injustice Amid Reform"

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College of Arts and Sciences, Intro to Archaeology ANT3101.66S19

Injustice

February 22, 1898

The Lynching of the Baker Family

With her husband Frazier and baby daughter Julia shot dead and lying at her feet, and wounded from the same bullet that killed her daughter, Lavinia Baker knew the only way out of the burning house was through the front door into the hail of the angry mob's bullets. Lavinia yelled for her 5 children to run. The family dashed from the building to a field across the road and hid among the shrubs. The bullets hit Lavinia and three of the children. The frightened and wounded family stayed hidden in the field until the mob dispersed and the fire was out. They met up at a neighbor's house and remained until the next morning when Lavinia and the five children were taken to the Charleston Colored Hospital to be treated under the care of Dr. Alonzo McClennan for two months. During the trial, Lavinia revealed, "We had only been in Lake City thirteen days. My husband went there some time before and sent for me."



Dr. McClennan setting Mr. Baker's arm.



Frazier Baker and his youngest daughter, Julia, perished in the burning house. The surviving family members were his wife Lavinia, and children, Rosa, Cora, Lincoln, Sarah, and William.

Justice Sought: Dr. Fostenia Baker

Living Relative

(Ferranti, "Why Kids Need to Learn About Lynching," 2017)



Dr. Fostenia Baker is Frazier B. Baker's grandniece. Born in 1941, she was 6 years old when Lavinia died. A South Carolina native currently living in Washington, D.C., she left the South in her early-20s. She is a retired history and science professor.

Dr. Baker appears in the film *An Outrage*, a documentary about lynching in the American South. Regarding the murder of her uncle, she says she "doesn't want to forget the past, as painful as it is." She remembers walking with her father near their ancestor's abandoned land asking, "Tell me something about Uncle Frazier." He answered, "Well, honey, it's a long, sad story."

Dr. Baker worked with U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-Columbia on the bill to rename the Lake City post office in honor of Frazier B. Baker. Upon hearing the bill had become law, she said, "We would be remiss if we didn't recognize that we are coming close to 121 years since the painful event against Frazier and the other members of the family. We as a family, are glad the recognition of this painful event finally happened. It's long overdue."

IMMEDIATE FAMILY

Frazier B. Baker

1855 - 1898

Frazier B. Baker was born in 1855 in South Carolina. He was a member of the Colored Farmers Alliance, a schoolteacher, the postmaster of Effingham, South Carolina, then finally the postmaster of Lake City, South Carolina. While being the postmaster of Lake City, he was threatened numerous times, due to the population of Lake City being primarily white. The people of Lake City attempted to shoot both Frazier B. Baker and his assistant numerous times, and they set the post office where he was residing on fire, causing him to move out of town. Though threats kept occurring, Frazier B. Baker felt safe enough to send for his family in early February, 1898. They were in town for only thirteen days before the lynching occurred. Frazier B. Baker was shot and killed on February 22, 1898 at 42 years old.



(Ancestry, "Lavinia Russell Baker," 2017)

Lavinia Russell Baker Widow

1861 - 1947

Lavinia was born in Effingham, SC and was 37 years old on the night of the lynching. During the attack, she was carrying her baby, Julia (almost 2), when she was shot with a bullet that passed through Julia's body into her own wrist, which caused her to drop her baby. After recuperating from her injuries and tending to her three other critically injured children, she remained in Charleston with her family for 16 more months. During that time, she received assistance from anti-lynching activists.

After the trial of the lynch mob, Lavinia moved her family to Boston at the urging of a young, white, activist reformer named Lillian Clayton Jewitt (below). For nearly two years under Jewitt's guidance -- some would say exploitation -- Lavinia and her family were paraded in front of audiences, revealing their injuries to horrified gasps as living testimony against the horrors of lynching.

Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison II raised \$1200 to provide a home for the Bakers in Boston. During the next twenty years, all of Lavinia's children passed away, four from tuberculosis. In 1942, after her last child died, Lavinia returned to Florence County, SC, less than five miles from Lake City.

Rosa (Rosella) Baker

1880 - 1942 (Ancestry, "Rosa Baker," 2017)



Rosa (Rosella) Baker was born in Effingham, South Carolina in 1880. She was 18-years-old on the night of the lynching. Rosa was wounded by gunshot to her arm which ended up broken. She moved with her mother, Lavinia Baker, and her siblings to Boston, Massachusetts. As an adult, she became a music teacher. She died in 1942 in Boston, Massachusetts. She was the eldest of the Baker children and lived the longest.



(Ancestry, "Lincoln Baker," 2017)

Lincoln Baker

1884 - 1916

Lincoln Baker was born in Effingham, South Carolina in 1884. Lincoln was 11-years-old on the night of the lynching. Lincoln was wounded by gunshot to his abdomen and suffered a broken arm. He moved with his mother Lavinia Baker and his siblings to Boston Massachusetts. As an adult, Lincoln worked as a laborer. He died in 1916 from Tuberculosis in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Cora Baker

1895 - 1920



(Ancestry, "Cora Baker," 2017)

Cora Baker was born April 1884 in Effingham, South Carolina. She was 14-years-old on the night of the lynching. She moved to Massachusetts with her mother and siblings in 1898. Her occupation was a housemaid. She died on March 9, 1920 from tuberculosis in Boston, MA.

Sarah Baker

1891 - 1909



(Ancestry, "20 Million Members have connected To a Deeper Family Story", 2019)

Born in 1891, Sarah Baker was the second youngest daughter. Her death record, accounted for in Chelsea, Massachusetts has Lavinia Russell listed as her mother but only the last name "Foster" listed as her father. This suggests that Sarah was an illegitimate daughter to Frazier Baker. She was 7-years-old at the time of the lynching. She, along with her brother William, were not harmed during that night. However, after her mother moved their family to Massueshetts, she was admitted to a Worcester State Asylum. Her occupation is listed as "housework". She unfortunately ended her life there while suffering from tuberculosis. She died in 1909, only 19-years-old.

William Baker

1893 - 1908



(Ancestry, "William Baker," 2017)

Born in 1893, William was the youngest Baker son and 5-years-old at the time of the lynching. After the lynching, his mother moved their family to Massueshetts. According to the Chelsea, Massachusetts death records, William's teenage occupation is listed as "errand boy". His primary cause of death reads "Phthisis" (an archaic name for Pulmonary Tuberculosis), most likely contracted from his older siblings when the family had fallen sick. William died in 1908 at the age of 15.

Julia Baker

1896 - 1898

Julia Baker was one year and eleven months when she was shot and killed during the lynching.

The Reformers

Lillian Clayton Jewitt and Ida B. Wells-Barnett

Lillian Clayton Jewitt

(Hux, *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 1991)



An aspiring author and anti-lynching advocate, Lillian Clayton Jewitt was 24-years-old and living in Boston at the time of the lynching. As news of the murder and trial caught national attention, Jewitt took a personal interest and saw it as an opportunity to arouse recognition for her campaign. She appealed to the members of a prominent African American church in Boston to help lead her effort to "rescue" the Bakers, who were reportedly in need of money. She wanted to bring the family to Boston. She faced a backlash from the city's Black elite and from the Colored National League who had already been working on the matter. They felt the league should handle any plans for the Bakers, not turn it over to "some chit of a white girl who sprang up overnight." Ignoring the passionate debate, Jewitt secretly traveled to Charleston where she convinced Lavinia to return to Boston promising to provide for the family.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett

(Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)



A prominent journalist, author, public speaker, and civil rights activist during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Wells-Barnett was known as the mother of the anti-lynching movement. The lynching of Frazier and Julia Baker outraged her. Determined to help the Baker family, she wrote letters to the Department of Justice and to the former Republican Senator Henry Dawes to urge the President for medical and financial aid for the surviving Baker family. Although she succeeded, the Bakers never received any money because the government's attention was distracted by another national crisis, the explosion of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor. Her frustration is expressed in her book on lynching in the US: "Here again was an illustration of how our own people seem to stand in the way of any accomplishment of federal intervention against lynching."

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In Loving Memory, this page is dedicated to Frazier B. Baker and his family. We would like to express our most profound appreciation for allowing us to bring this Injustice to light.