

Eric Arthur Ormond Baker
June 24, 1889 – June 21, 1976

The Eric Ormond Baker Charitable Fund was established in 1978 to comply with the wishes of the Late Mr. Eric Arthur Ormond Baker (known as Mr. Eric Ormond Baker) Gentleman and Officer of Her Majesty's Order of the British Empire and a Knight of the Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem.

Clearly outlined in the Last Will and Testament of the Late Mr. Baker are his wishes for a Fund to be established from his residual estate. He declared that the Fund be called the Eric Ormond Baker Charitable Fund and that it operates

“in perpetuity to or for such charitable organizations or purposes in Victoria as in the opinion of my Trustees fall within any of the following descriptions and as they may from time to time select a hospital not conducted for profit - a public benevolent institution or public benevolent society - an organization established for the relief of persons in necessitous circumstances - public scientific purposes - public educational purposes”

The life of Eric Ormond Baker was clearly shaped and defined by world and local events that occurred during the time in which he lived and by the way he chose to live through those times. Consequently any profile that attempts to portray an accurate depiction of his life must take into account the events taking place before and during his time. Contained in the following pages is information about:

- E. O. Baker's 50 years with the Myer Emporium Limited
- E. O. Baker's family and it's early pioneering years
- E. O. Baker's corporate, community, and social activities
- E. O. Baker's, time as a Freemason
- A letter to E. O. Baker from Dame Merlyn Myer

Eric Ormond Arthur Baker

Eric Ormond Baker was an Australian by birth, born at 24 Park Street, South Melbourne on June 24 1889. He was the eleventh child of twelve children born to Daniel Baker and Caroline Augusta Baker (nee Gray). At the time of Eric's birth his father was a primary produce merchant in South Melbourne and his mother ran a private school in Albert Park.

Along with his brothers and sisters he attended St Luke's church and Sunday school in South Melbourne where the Baker family were an integral part of the church community. His father Daniel was forced to sell his business at the turn of the century due to ill health. He left school at an early age to provide for his family. Eric took his first job with the established business of Wright & Neil which was purchased by Sydney Myer, a retailer from Bendigo.

Myer

Twelve year old Eric Baker commenced duties in the Haberdashery Department at five shillings a week; starting work at 8:00am and finishing at 6:00pm. "In those days all lads were required to attend the despatch before signing off", said EOB. There they would be given a parcel to be delivered in the district in which they resided, sometimes not reaching home until 7:30pm for dinner.

"The custom was to give lads experience in the trade so one worked in practically all sections", said EOB. Eventually Baker was placed in the piece goods department in which section he was when the Late Sydney Myer acquired that business in 1911. His duties there included dressing windows and writing display cards for both the windows and departments.

Baker enlisted in the A.I.F. early in 1915 and proceeded to Egypt with reinforcements of the 8th Battalion. There the 15th Brigade was formed under the Late General Elliott comprising of the 57th, 58th, 59th, and 60th Battalions; as a Sergeant Baker was transferred to the newly formed 59th Battalion which later saw service in France and Bulgaria. In this Unit he obtained Commission as Regimental Sergeant Major, then later promoted to Captain and Adjutant. He was wounded in 1917 but remained with the unit until it disbanded in 1919.

He returned to Australia after a brief holiday and resumed his duties in the piece goods sections. Two months later he was transferred to the personnel office. He became assistant staff manager to the then Staff Superintendent Manager H. E. Wilson. In 1924 Baker was appointed Staff Superintendent.

In 1927 the James Marshall store in Adelaide was purchased by the Myer organization and Baker with others went there to assist in staffing for that business. He engaged the original staff for the new Myer Adelaide store and was there for six weeks.

In 1934 Baker went abroad for six months to visit stores in England, Europe, and America, and returned fully satisfied that Personnel Department at Myer Melbourne knew more about the staff of their store than did the Personnel Departments of those stores visited; the staff in the stores abroad were just so many numbers in bodies.

In 1938 the company created a number of Associate Directors and Baker was one of those appointed. In 1941 he was made Personnel Director a position he held until his leaving the store to retire in 1953.

During a period of over 50 years Baker watched the store grow both existentially and physically. From a modest retail outlet to a store that stretches two city blocks.

He has also taken active interests in the social life of the store and appreciated the opportunities offered by the office he held. His aim in the store mirrored his aim in life; to help the other chap, and cement the good relationships between management and staff.

During the Second World War he kept in touch by personal correspondence with the service personnel. He wrote and received thousands of letters, and acted as a trustee of the banking accounts of many of the men.

Baker also claimed to be the first in the retail business of Melbourne to engage staff from university and school to train as temporary hands for the Christmas Trading. Many medical and other professional men had their first job with the Myer Store and called from time to time to say "How do" and renew acquaintances.

Baker was actively associated with the Myer Ball from its commencement as its first secretary, with the Late McCallum Neil but as president. When the later retired from the business Baker was elected president and held the position until after retirement. He has attended every Myer Ball held, the first after world war one in 1920 being in the Melbourne Town Hall.

He played football and cricket with the Myer store in early days. Under his direction one important fund for the staff which was established in 1940 was the Mortality Fund. This was the outcome of a suggestion by one of the staff, the late Jim Jamieson, electrician. The fund had been of utmost assistance to many and since its formation paid to beneficiaries well in excess of £12,000.

The Myer Staff Men's Association was another important activity within the stores, with a membership of over 500, and was one of the many amenities which claimed his attention.

He was always keen on amateur sport and every Saturday during football season could be seen with the Myer Football Club over which he presides.

Eric Ormond Baker retired in 1954, leaving Myer to continue his work in public life, serving the community, the State, and the Nation; taking time out for his hobbies, swimming and gardening.

The Early Years

E. O. Baker's Pioneering Grandparents & Parents

The following is a selected chronology of events leading up to E. O. Baker's year of birth of in 1889. Included, are in text references to world events, which provide some context to the time and place of the beginnings of the Baker family in Australia.

1835 First settlers to Melbourne construct a camp on the banks of the Yarra.
In the same year Charles Darwin arrives at the Galapagos Islands aboard the

HMS Beagle; and Lord Melbourne succeeds Sir Robert Peel as British Prime Minister. William IV is King of England (Williamstown is named after him).

1839 Henry Baker and Margaret Sommerville arrive in Melbourne. In the same year Melbourne is officially named after the British Prime Minister of the time. Also in 1839 Victoria becomes Queen of England; and the first Henly Royal Regatta is held.

1840 Henry Baker and Margaret Sommerville marry. In the same year George Cavanaugh founds one of the Herald-Sun's predecessor papers The Port Phillip Herald. Also in 1840 Britain releases the Penny Black the world's first adhesive postage stamp; and David Livingstone leaves for Africa.

1841 Daniel Baker is born to Henry and Margaret Baker in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. In the same year the United Kingdom begins its occupation of Hong Kong. Born this year is Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII of the United Kingdom.

1872 Daniel Baker and Caroline Augusta Gray marry. In the same decade the telephone, the phonograph, and the light bulb are invented.

1889 Eric Arthur Ormond Baker is born to Daniel and Caroline Baker in Park Street, South Melbourne. In the same year the Eiffel Tower opens; the first issue of the Wall Street Journal is published; and Charlie Chaplin and Adolf Hitler are also born.

Eric Ormond Baker's grandparents were among colonial Australia's earliest pioneers, migrating from Scotland and England at a time when Australia was primarily seen as nothing more than a penal colony.

Henry Baker, Eric Ormond Baker's paternal grandfather, was Eric's earliest paternal ascendant to arrive in Australia from England. Henry Baker migrated to Australia by ship, probably in 1838 at 24 years of age. Records show that Margaret Sommerville, Eric Ormond Baker's paternal grandmother, arrived at Port Jackson, Sydney from Plymouth aboard the ship the James Patterson on December 11 1838 at 19 years of age. She arrived with at least three of her siblings, Isabella, John, and Jean and her father George Sommerville. George Sommerville was born in Scotland in 1800.

Henry Baker appears to have travelled to Australia alone and met the Sommervilles either in Sydney or once they had all arrived in Melbourne in 1839. Henry and Margaret appear to have enjoyed a standard engagement period marrying nearly eighteen months after arriving in Melbourne at a Presbyterian Church near Geelong on October 16, 1840.

There are two Henry Bakers listed in an early Almanac from 1842: one is a carpenter listed at Malop Street, North Corio the other is the publican of the Imperial Inn, Collins Street,

Melbourne. It is unclear, yet likely, that one of these Henry Bakers was Eric Baker's grandfather.

At this time Melbourne was little more than pastoral land occupied by enterprising stockowners from Tasmania and their flocks of sheep that numbered nearly half a million. The population of Melbourne in 1842 had risen to over four thousand from the few hundred that existed when Hoddle had laid out the Melbourne's distinctive grid pattern of streets, roads, and grand boulevards only five years earlier. 1842 was also the year of birth of Eric Ormond Baker's father, Daniel Baker.

Daniel Baker was born at premises on Elizabeth Street, to Henry and Margaret Baker. George Sommerville, Margaret's father, likely owned the premises. It may have been an Inn; this is likely but also undetermined. At this time streets lacked footpaths, and were difficult to traverse due to huge holes left by dug out stumps. Elizabeth Street followed the course of a gully and consequently flooded whenever it rained.

Records indicate that Henry Baker and his family moved north of Melbourne and farmed land along the Merri Creek near Pentridge (today's Coburg). Bakers Road Coburg is named after them. The Bakers joined others who started market gardens in the same area such as John Pascoe Fawcner after which Pascoe Vale is named. Indications are that the Bakers lived at Pentridge for many years and it was here that Margaret gave birth to Daniel Baker's brother, John, and five sisters, Georgina, Isabella, Jean (Jane), Margaret, and Mary Ann.

Brunswick became the first major stopping point out of Melbourne on the road to Sydney. Brickworks that once occupied land on the southern banks of the Yarra moved to Brunswick and began what would become Melbourne's first industrial area. Brunswick, with its wide boulevard access (today's Royal Parade), quickly sprung up as one of Melbourne's suburbs along with Newton (today's Carlton and Fitzroy), St Kilda, and Port Melbourne.

At around the same time Margaret Baker's family, the Sommervilles, also moved north, to Campbellfield, where Margaret's father, George Sommerville, farmed the land with his family. Given that Henry Baker appears to have arrived in Melbourne with no family ties, it is not surprising to find that the children from the marriage of Henry Baker and Margaret Sommerville enjoyed a close relationship with their maternal grand parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. This is attested to in the many letters exchanged between the family members in the second half of the 1800's.

In contrast, no mention can be found of Henry Baker's parents or siblings. The only description that can be found of Henry Baker appears in one of Melbourne's early newspapers and refers to Henry as a Gentleman of good standing, one of Melbourne's earliest pioneers and colonists.

A Full Life

Overview of corporate and public activities

- 1st A.I.F 1915-1919 – 59th Battalion – Highest Rank: Adjutant
- 59th Battalion Association A.I.F. – Life Vice-President

- Anti Cancer Appeal Committee
- Associate Director of Personnel – the Myer Emporium Limited
 - 50 years with the Myer Emporium Limited
- Auxiliary Ambulance Service – President during WWII, under A.R.P.
- Blind Babies Fund Committee – committee member
- Hospital Benefits Association
 - Executive Member for 38 years
- Justice of the Peace
 - Serving for 38 years
 - Member of the Honourable Justice’s Association
- Knight of the Order of St John of Jerusalem
- Life Governor of several hospitals
- Limbless Soldiers Association – Trustee
- Lord Mayor’s Fund
 - Executive and Council
 - Vice President Advisory Board
 - Longest serving member at 44 years
- Lord Mayor’s Red Cross Appeal Committee - Chairman during WWII
- Melbourne Cricket Club
 - Member for 52 years
- Mercantile Cricket Association
 - Life Member
 - President (Longest serving at 26 years)
- Mrs Sydney Myer Silver Jubilee Trust Fund – Trustee
- Myer Cricket Club – Life Vice-President
- Myer Staff Men’s Association
 - Life Vice-President
 - President (Longest serving at 34 years)
- Officer of the Order of the British Empire
- Olympic Swimming Club – Patron
- Return Soldier’s and Sailor’s League, Ivanhoe Branch – Life Member
- South Melbourne Cricket Club – Patron
- South Melbourne Football Club - Patron
- South Melbourne Police Boy’s Association – Trustee
- St John’s Ambulance Association –
 - Treasurer (16 years)
- St John’s Ambulance Council
 - Chairman 1942, then 1950 until 1975
 - Member of the Priory for Australia
- St John’s Ambulance National Headquarters, Canberra
 - Appearance on the ‘Founder’s Roll’ as a contributor
 - Significant donor toward the cost of construction
- V.R.C., V.A.T.C., M.V.R.C., and R.A.C.V. - member
- Victoria Civil Ambulance Country Division
 - President
- Victorian Amateur Boxing Club and Wrestling Association

- Life Member
- President (Longest serving at 18 years)
- Victorian Civil Ambulance - President (Longest Serving at 35 years)

“From your friend and Admirer”

Letter from Merlyn Myer on E.O.B.’s Retirement

Toorak
June 29th

My Dear Mr. Baker,

This day must be a very proud one, yet also one of many regrets.

When I think of the many beautiful letters you have written me over the past thirty four years I am feeling most inadequate to express to you my thoughts today on your retirement.

Ever since I first knew the Store – in 1916 – E. O. Baker has always been part of it – just part of its solid foundation, like the bricks and concrete of which it is built. I’m sure the record years of your service to such a wonderful organisation has given you the greatest satisfaction – also what a sense of real achievement you must have in the life long loyalty you have given to the Store.

If any thanks I might offer you on behalf of myself and my family are of any value – I do assure you I thank you very whole heartedly for all you have done always for me and for the business.

Your record will surely be unequalled in the city and I know how grateful and how proud my husband would have been. He knew the true worth of so many fine men in the Store with whom he started his career. The men he worked with, and trusted, have certainly played their part so nobly.

So with much sadness Eric, I say “au revoir” to you now as part of the fabric of the Myer Emporium. I’m sure great happiness lies ahead for you in your well deserved retirement. Someone mentioned you are off on a world trip – how wise you are – there is so much of interest in the big world.

God bless you, and may health and happiness be yours always from your friend and Admirer.

Sincerely
Merlyn Myer

The Lodge

Masonic History

- Initiated in Melbourne Lodge No. 17 on July 14 1913
- Break for service in World War I from 1915 to 1919.

- Installed as Wor. Master in 1931
- Grand Lodge Activities:
- Grand Sword Bearer 1933 - 1934
- Assistant Grand Director 1935 –1936
- Grand Director 1936 – 1937
- Grand Treasurer 1938 – 1939
- Senior Grand Warden 1947 – 1948
- Promoted to Past Deputy Grand Master in 1959
- Member of The Board of General Purposes for 26 years
- Representative here of the Grand Lodge of New York

- He is also a Past Master of The Lodge of Comradeship No. 574 and has been made a special member of the same after 50 years in the Craft.

- He has been a special member of the Caxton Lodge No 514 since 1960

- In the Mark Degrees he is a Past Master of West Melbourne Lodge No. 88 and after several active Grand Lodge appointments is now a Past Deputy Grand Master and a member of the Board of General Purposes.

- In the Royal Arch Chapter, he was First Principal of the Mornington Chapter, and is also a Member of the West Melbourne Chapter. In Grand Chapter he hold the Rank of Past Second Grand Principal and is a Member of the Committee of General Purposes.

- He is also a member of several Higher Masonic degrees and Orders, which makes him a member of a total of 13 Lodges.