

Dexter W. Baker was only labor-keeper

# History of the Abagadasset Point Range Lights

*Autobiography of Dexter W. Baker  
with photos*

History of Abagadasset Point Range Lights

Recollections of the Old Lamp Lighter

Compiled by Marilyn Temple Bennett  
with the assistance of Thelma Baker Parker

2004

Dear Ed

This is probably more of a history of  
the light keeper than the range lights  
but the last page gives some history.  
Dexter Baker was my gr-grandfather's  
brother.

Sylvia

## Dexter W. Baker served as only keeper of Abagadasset Point Range Lights

A man of simple means, who lived in Woolwich all his life, had the distinction of serving as the only keeper of the Abagadasset Point Range Lights once located on the east bank of the Kennebec River about five miles above Bath.

Dexter W. Baker was appointed as labor-keeper Aug. 8, 1903. According to the *Lighthouse Digest*, he received the appointment after the lights were first lit on June 30 of that year. He continued to serve until the lights were decommissioned sometime between 1927 and 1935 when steamboats stopped running to Augusta.

Mr. Baker took his work very seriously and is remembered by his great-granddaughter as a very conscientious, responsible man. He made his living on his farm on the Chops Point Road, Woolwich. With a meager income in those days, no doubt his annual salary of \$250 a year as keeper of the light was a great financial help.

He was born June 27, 1864, the 10th child in a family of 11 born to John and Mary (Peavey) Baker. After the death of his brother, Franklin he married Franklin's widow, Carrie and helped care for Carrie and Frank's children, Walter and Alda. Carrie and Dexter also had one son, Clarence E. Baker. After the untimely death of Walter's wife, Carrie and Dexter took over the care of Walter's only daughter who was a toddler. Under their guidance she was able to attend college and become a teacher.

Besides being well known as a farmer, Mr. Baker was very active in the affairs of the North Woolwich Methodist Church. He served as church trustee for a number of years until ill health forced him to retire a few years before his death. He served as Sunday school superintendent for many years.

It was his custom during his lifetime to faithfully read his Bible every morning and evening. He always had a workhorse on the farm. In the 1920's, it was "Fannie" who helped him with the farm work and in the 1930's "Isaac" (Ike) pulled the plow and helped with the haying.

Carrie Baker predeceased her husband in 1923. Mr. Baker died Feb. 7, 1937 at the age of 72 from a heart ailment. Only one of his 10 siblings was surviving at the time of his death. In 2004, two grandchildren, Irving C. Baker of Brunswick and Thelma (Baker) Parker of New Jersey, two step-great-grandchildren, Marilyn (Temple) Bennett of Elliottsville Twp. and Hayden Dexter Temple of Woolwich, and many great-grandchildren survive.

This obituary appeared in the Bath Times and the Bath Independent in February 1937:

### Dexter W. Baker

#### Life Long Resident of Woolwich Dies at His Home Sunday, Aged 72 Years

Dexter W. Baker, 72, a life long resident of Woolwich, died Sunday (Feb. 7, 1937) at his home in the north end of the town after a year's illness from a heart ailment.

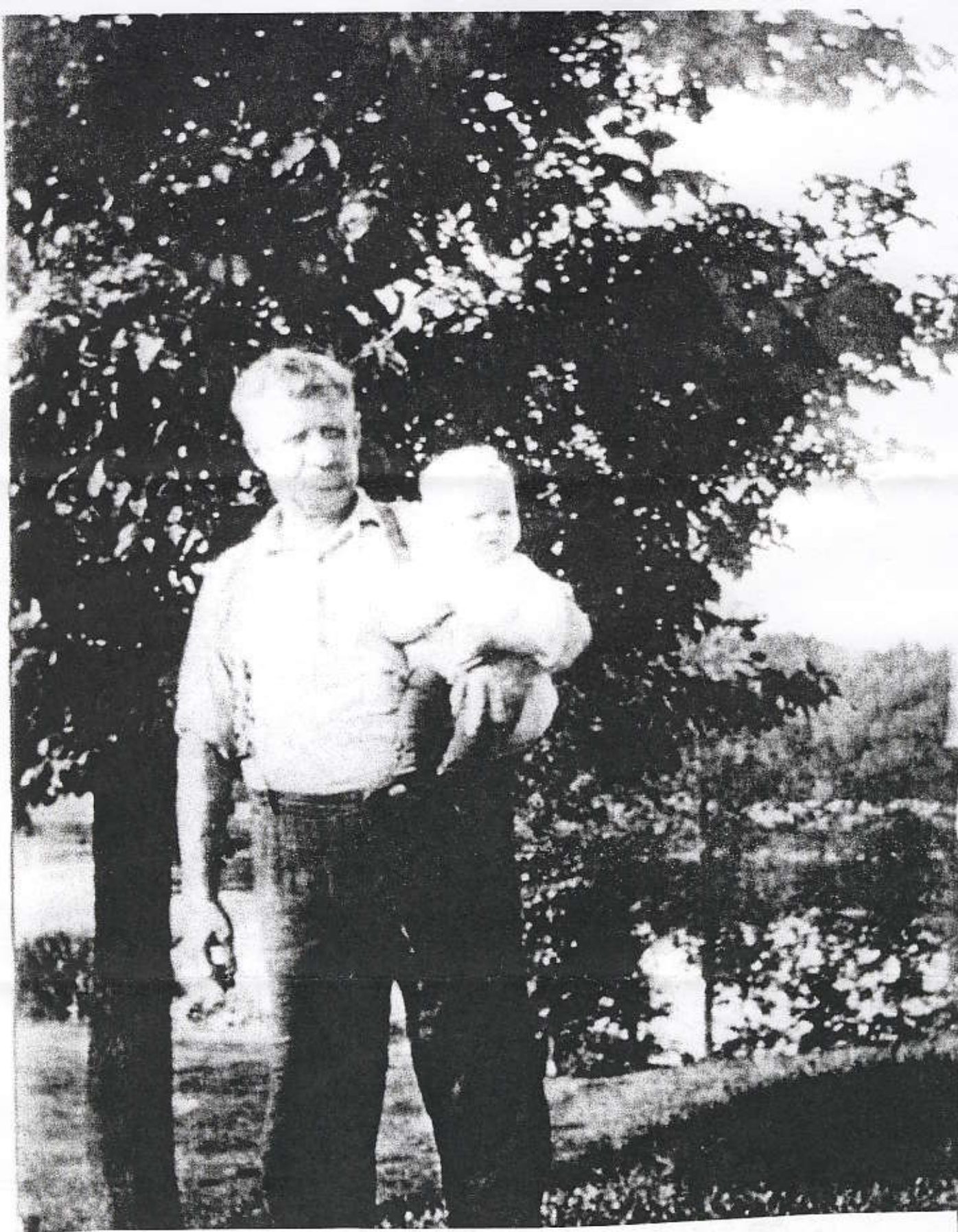
Mr. Baker was born in Woolwich, a son of John and Mary (Peavey) Baker, and was a well known farmer. He was active in the affairs of the North Woolwich Methodist Church of which he had been a trustee for several years and, until his resignation a few years ago, had also been superintendent of the Sunday school.

He is survived by one son, Clarence Baker, and by one stepson, Walter Baker, both of Woolwich; one brother, Joseph Baker of Randolph; and by several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The funeral will be Wednesday afternoon at two in the North Woolwich Methodist Church.



**Labor-Keeper - Dexter W. Baker of Woolwich, above, served as the only tender of the Abagadasset Point Range Lights on the Kennebec River from 1903 until about 1935. This photo was taken in 1925 at Chops Point near his home. He is riding his horse, Fannie.**



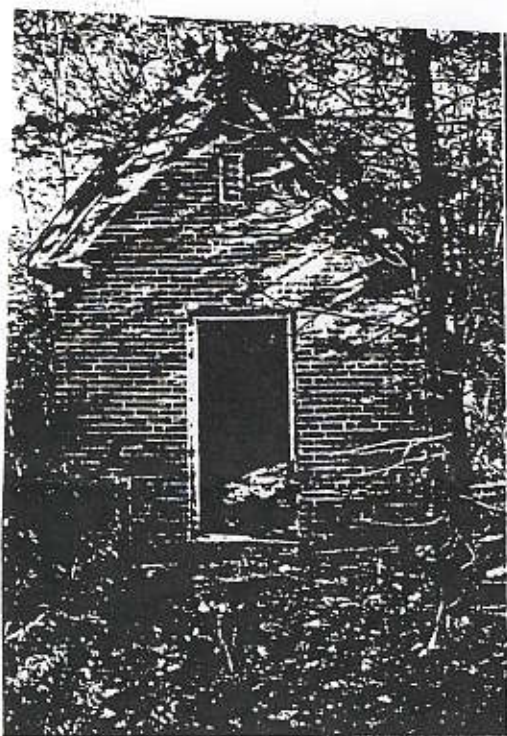
**PHOTO TAKEN AT MERRYMEETING CAMP, Chops Point, Woolwich, Dexter W. Baker is shown holding his granddaughter, Thelma Baker in 1925. Grandpa Baker died Feb. 7, 1937 at the age of 72. Thelma, daughter of Clarence and Gertrude Baker, grew up and married James Parker. In 2004, she is living in New Jersey. (Photo courtesy of Thelma Parker.)**

## Remembering the 'Old Lamp Lighter'

by Marilyn Temple Bennett

I remember when my great-grandfather, Dexter W. Baker would take me with him to tend the Abagadasset Point Range Lights. I lived with him, and my parents and brother, on his farm which bordered the land where the light was located. It was probably about 1935 during his last days of being the light keeper that I recall. We used to walk a short distance north of the farm (approximately a quarter of a mile) to reach the lights.

He would fill the lights from the oil house and then climb the tower to light them. I was never allowed to do more than stand and watch. I remember how tall the tower looked and how serious he was about doing the work. He was a loving grandfather. He died in 1937 when I was seven-years-old. He is buried in Partridge Cemetery, Woolwich.



*This oil house is the only building that remains standing on the site of Maine's Abagadasset Point Range Lights. Photograph by Ted Panayotoff.*

### **Other Information from the Lighthouse Digest**

The Abagadasset Point Range Lights were built to provide indication of safe passage around Abagadasset Point, which is on the west bank of the river opposite the range lights.

The lights were fixed red lights (lens lanterns) with the front light on a white post 15 feet high and 25 feet above mean water and the rear light was on a 26 foot white post 56 feet above mean high water. The rear light was 257 yards from the front light. A 1927 Coast Pilot refers to the range in instructions for transiting the Kennebec River to Gardiner and Augusta, Maine.

The 1935 Light List does not list the range lights, so they were probably discontinued and the site decommissioned sometime between 1927 and 1935 when the steamboats stopped running to Augusta.

In 2000, Ted Panayotoff of the Elms B&B in Camden located the lights, or more accurately what remains of them, by using a handheld GPS receiver programmed with the latitude and longitude coordinates of the lights. The location of the rear light is now in a power line right of way and covered with dense brush. If any of the structure remains it was well hidden and couldn't be located without a difficult search.

However, the front light remains are quite recognizable. The oil house is still there (2003); a bit worse for wear but considering its age, it is not in too bad of shape. The stumps of the tower are there along with a section of tower leg lying where it fell when it was cut down. One corner of the property is still marked with a granite "USLHE" marker.

There is a barely recognizable road leading to about 100 feet from the front light. At the end of the road there is a pile of debris, which seemed to be the remains of a small wooden structure. Whether it was related to the range light was not evident from what was left of it.

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### **Footnote**

The information contained in this section on Dexter W. Baker was sent to the Lighthouse Museum in Wells, Maine where it is being kept in the archives. The picture (displayed in this booklet) of him riding his horse, Fannie, is also on display in the museum. He is also included in the American Lighthouse Foundation's video entitled *Lighthouses of Maine*. It is available for \$19.95 through the foundation: P.O. Box 889, Wells, Me. 04090.