

BAKER'S BOYHOOD

EASTON JOURNALIST, CHILDHOOD
FRIEND OF REDOUBTABLE
BATTER, WRITES HUMAN
INTEREST STORY.

Describes Frank As a Nice, Quiet Boy,
And Tells Of Time He Shot Her
Brother's Pet Crow And
Scored An Error.

In the baseball extra of the Richmond Evening Journal of October 11 is a down-to-the-ground, human-interest story of incidents of the childhood of that renowned exponent of the home run—John Franklin Baker, of Trappe, Md. And this story was done by a girl from Talbot, Miss Helen Berry, who is now upon the staff of the Journal.

Miss Berry put into this column genuine local color; her touch is light and attractive and the anecdotes are the real anecdotes of real people. This is what she writes on the margin of the paper:

"I did this story marked for the Journal today. They liked it. Mr. Cooke said I could have gotten \$100 for it if I had sent it to a New York paper first; that they would have featured it for the Sunday paper. I hardly think that is true; it seems too much."

And here is the story as it appeared in the Journal:

There's a Maryland girl in one of the Ninth Street office buildings who went to school and played baseball with Home-Run Frank Baker. She has known Baker practically all his life and recounts many interesting stories of their school days together.

One of her most amusing is about a game during the last inning of which she went to bat when there were "five out and the bases full," and when, having bunted the ball, she couldn't run because all the bases were occupied.

"Why, Frank Baker and I were great friends," she said. "I hope he has not forgotten all about me. He was always such a little gentleman and so kind to the girls when we played together.

formerly the old Methodist burying ground, and a creepy place at night, but all the explanations of both teams could not convince me that it was fair to make the other girls run if they did not like to risk it. Baker said: "The next time you play we will have an extra base made for you.

Killed Pet Crow.

Of course, Frank went with the other boys swimming, fishing, gunning, and ducking, and learned, as all the others did, to swim by being unexpectedly shoved off old Trappe wharf into the steamboat channel and having to swim or else be pulled out by the others and laughed at, and he brought up his handful of mud to prove he had touched bottom.

"He is especially good with a gun, and his father depended on him to keep the cornfield free of crows, and he did. My brother had an old tame crow, so well acquainted around Trappe that he went to a different place every day for dinner, and sat outside cawing until the cook fed him. Of course, being a crow, he visited cornfields, and among them Mr. Baker's. Frank was out with his gun, and old Jim flew over about forty yards from him and began to quarrel about it. Of course, Frank was surprised, but thought him wild and banged away. The crow was hard hit and put out of the game for good, but it was Baker's error. Nobody ever made him eat crow that I know of, however.

"Like most famous men still living, he once escaped a horrible death. Down in Talbot, about twenty years ago, was an old horse named Bill, one of the eat-'em-alive, chew-'em-up kind that nobody could manage, and he was traded half over the county, finally to Mr. Baker. This old horse was especially dangerous when grazing, and would chew up everything in his way, from a man to a grass blade.

"Frank was a four-year-old toddler at the time. Old Bill caught him out in the front yard one day, and started for him with ears back and nothing showing but the whites of his eyes, but not having Frank's batting average, he missed his mark, and merely knocked the little kid over on the grass, jumping clear over him, and leaving him unhurt but yelling. Needless to say, the elder Baker went horse trading the next day.

"Frank had been making home runs and winning games for years before he ever knew of such a team as the Athletics, and the world's series to him meant that Trappe must 'whitewash' the neighboring towns and so be champions of Falbot.

"Trappe?

"Not to know Trappe argues one unacquainted with a most delightful little village on the Eastern Shore, over 200 years in the making and still childlike—a rather overgrown cross roads and postoffice, from colonial times—a meeting place for the men of the old families to talk politics and for the ladies to shop and attend church, and for the slaves and later on the freed negroes to gather and make merry.

"Frank Baker went to primary school, a little one-room affair with five grades scattered about it, when I did. He came in late in the fall after the farm work was finished.

"One morning I was playing paper dolls behind cover of reader and slate when somebody in the seat behind gave a yank to one of my curls, and on turning round a rather clumsy country boy, several years older than I, so dark that he seemed almost sun-baked, with thick black eyelashes and dirty hands, said "Let me see 'em."

"Of course I passed them over and told their names, but the teacher (it always happens) saw the transfer and came down to investigate. (They were beautiful cut paper dolls with chalk colored dresses of red and blue and pink.) 'Put them in the fire,' she snapped, 'and stay in after school.'

"Coming back disconsolately from the stove I saw the typical Baker grin, so good-natured and sympathetic that it was consoling. 'You certainly can cut out fine dolls,' he said, 'the lines are so even, better than my sister can,' and so we felt very well acquainted.

Was Very Quiet.

"Frank was always the one to sharpen slate pencils, turn the jumping rope and climb the mulberry tree and throw down mulberries to the girls who couldn't climb; very quiet and easy-going, but a great borrower when it came to slate rags and sponges.

"Of course the primary school had a ball team, and once, after much pleading, the girls were allowed to play. It was an exciting game and very close, because anybody batted who wished to and there was no

Clerked in Store.

"After he stopped school Frank farmed and clerked in his brother-in-law's store in Trappe. The store was a grocery and the only butcher shop in town. Incidentally he cut fine steaks and always plenty of fat thrown in extra to fry them with. Everything seemed rather a science to the quiet country boy, something to be done deliberately and carefully.

"One day his little sister took one of the little brothers in his carriage up to the store to buy groceries and bacon. While she was buying out of the carriage went little brother on his head and down—bang!—on the pavement. They both made a home run howling and Frank left the store and came ambling along behind bringing home the bacon.

I am quite sure that all New York fandom could not disturb the Trappe boy. He is trained up to a noise. Old Trappe on Saturday nights is overrun with negroes. They crowd the stores, fill the sidewalks and block the streets until it is almost impossible for a team to pass. One old negro brings along a banjo and they dance in the streets, while not a white woman and very few men venture outside the noses. It is a bedlam of good-natured noise and excitement, while the stores are crowded with negroes buying and trading and loafing and talking.

"In the midst of all that Frank calmly sold coffee and sugar to one man, while twenty were yelling to him that they needed waiting on, and 'What is the price of eggs?' and 'Would he buy spring chickens?' Nothing could disturb a man who has had such excellent training.

"And then how many games they won. Frank and his brother Patsy. No one in Trappe can forget Patsy, the taller, lankier brother, who pitched ball with real curves that all the small boys tried to imitate. There was no kind of a ball that he could not pitch according to those same small boys, and the two of them sent many a team home 'whitewashed.'

"One game I remember. The score was a tie with a good pitcher opposing, and it looked rough for the home team, when up came Baker to bat and sent a ball so far out into the cornfield that nobody found it that day, and the game after that was easy. This was Frank's first home run.

limit to the players. The ball was a home-made one of a dozen kinds of strings covered with rather a roughly fitted leather jacket, and it skipped about in the air quite to suit itself in marvelous curves as the wind caught its rough edges.

"The bat was a broken off piece of the board fence whittled down to paddle shape and fully four inches across.

"Baker was playing for the girls, and we were allowed six times out instead of three, because we were merely girls and couldn't play anyway. The girls came up alphabetically to bat, and systematically struck out, all recess. Finally luck turned, and with five out and the bases full I had to bat. Every time the ball came near the plate I dropped the bat and jumped to keep it from hitting me. Finally, after two strikes and two balls, the pitcher in despair said: 'If you will keep the bat still I will hit it for you and then you can run.'

"Luckily I could do that, and the ball rebounded a few feet, but nobody picked it up; they were all watching me, and all our side yelled, 'Run.' I started, but lo and behold, all the bases were full of very contented looking girls and there was no place to run. It seemed an unfair thing to make the others risk a chance of being put out when they were quite safe where they were, so I just took home base as my choice and stood on that until somebody would start something and give me a chance, and then they said I was out and the game lost.

"We argued it out on the school lot,

Stole First Base.

"A rather amusing incident came up during the game. The field was rough and the bases marked by very home-made bags filled with sand. The visiting team was at bat in the fifth with a man on first and two out. The man on first was trying to steal second, with an eye on Patsy, pitching. Just as he wound up for a curve, the boy on first stooped down, picked up the bag and tore toward second. Luckily Patsy unwound in time and sent the ball to second. The runner, over half way to second by that time, merely dropped the bag, and stood on it, insisting that he was still on first. 'Here it is; I am standing on it.' There was a squabble and then a laugh and the runner was out. Patsy had balked, of course, but they weren't counting such things then.

"The Baker boys were very kind to the smaller boys around town. They cut up a real 1.25 ball to get a pattern for the smaller boys. After one of the games we noticed the visiting pitcher pick up a ball, put it in his pocket and hurry to the carriage. A few minutes after Frank missed one of his balls, and we smaller fans were for arresting the pitcher on the spot, or at least killing him, but Frank merely said, 'I guess he made a mistake; don't say anything about it.' And though it was undoubtedly true and to him meant actual loss, because he was a country boy to whom dollars meant nickels and dimes and quarters that must be earned and not merely asked for, still he kept quiet about it.'

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