

Collection of William Emerson Baker Materials  
Wellesley Historical Society

**Repository Identifier**

mawelhs

**Local Identifier**

2016.22

**Name and Location of Repository**

The Wellesley Historical Society  
229 Washington Street  
Wellesley, MA 02481  
(781) 235-6690  
www.wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org

**Title**

Collection of William Emerson Baker Materials, 1850s – 1983

**Date**

1850s – 1983

**Extent**

2 linear feet, 4 boxes

**Name of Creator**

Wellesley Historical Society

**Biographical Note**

William Emerson Baker was born in Roxbury Massachusetts on April 16, 1828. His parents Abel and Sarah (Reed) Baker had originally intended for their son to attend college; however, when Abel's business failed, William began working at a wool jabbing firm located in Boston at the age of 16. After spending a year as a low paid apprentice, Baker asked for the opportunity to earn commission based on the amount of business he could bring in. This move allowed Baker to save aggressively and by 1849 he had several thousand dollars which he sought to invest.

Through his work with the wool jabbing company Baker became acquainted with William O. Grover, a Boston area tailor who had recently purchased the manufacturing rights from Elias Howe for a sewing machine. Grover was looking for a partner to handle the development and marketing of the new machine he was interested in creating. Grover and Baker become partners forming the Grover & Baker company in 1850. The machine developed by Grover & Baker could take both the top and bottom threads from the spool which eliminated the need for a separate bobbin. The company was granted patents for their machine in 1851 and 1852 and the stitch created became known as the Grover & Baker stitch. The company soon spread from Boston with branch offices as far away as Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1854 – 1856 Baker traveled to Europe where he oversaw the spread of the company across the Atlantic.

By the time Baker returned to the United States in 1856, the company was well regarded and making a profit. This left Baker with more time and money for leisure activities. He was

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interested in the topics of arts, science, and social reform. He gave his time and money liberally to institutions and causes related to these subjects. Baker married Charlotte Farnsworth of Roxbury on September 20, 1860. The couple had two sons, Edward T. Baker, and Walter Farnsworth Baker.

In 1868 Baker retired from active participation in Grover & Baker, but retained financial interest in the company until it was sold in 1876. Baker retired as a wealthy man and in 1886 began purchasing land in the southwest corner of Needham. Over the course of several years Baker would come to own nearly 800 acres of land. The Baker Estate in Needham, which served as the family's summer home, became known as Ridge Hill Farms. Over the course of Baker's ownership, the property was transformed into something closer to an amusement park in addition to a summer residence for a family. At its peak Ridge Hill Farms was home to over 100 attractions which included man-made lakes, bear pits, various exhibits, and a luxury hotel. Portions of the property were open to the public and Baker hosted a number of events, such as a funeral for a bear by the name of Billy Bruin. When the Town of Wellesley separated from West Needham in 1881, a portion of Ridge Hill Farms fell within the limits of the new town of Wellesley.

After Baker died in January 1888 Ridge Hill Farms was retained by the family for two years before it was sold. By the 1930's many of the larger buildings including Hotel Wellesley had been lost to fire. The smaller structures were sold or taken down, so that today all that remains from Ridge Hill Farms are the two man-made lakes. The majority of the land which originally was part of Ridge Hill Farms was divided up and developed into residential housing. Twenty five acres of the original estate was donated to Wellesley Conservation Council, Inc. through two separate donations made by Mr. and Mrs. William Guernsey to create Guernsey Sanctuary. The Guernseys first donated 13 acres of land on Sabrina Lake in 1961 and later added another 12 acres. The sanctuary includes a pine grove, woodlands, a vernal pond, island, swamp, as well as views of Sabrina Lake.

### **Scope and Content Note**

This collection contains materials related to William Emerson Baker, the Grover & Baker Sewing Machine company, and the Ridge Hill Farms property. The bulk of the collection is made up of historical research and writing pertaining to the development and decline of Ridge Hill Farms as well as photographs of the various attractions and buildings found at Ridge Hill Farms.

### **Index Terms**

Advertisements  
Amusement Parks — Massachusetts — Wellesley  
Biographies  
Clippings  
Historic Buildings — Massachusetts — Wellesley  
Massachusetts — Wellesley  
Photographs  
Ridge Hill Farms (Needham, Mass.)  
Ridge Hill Farms (Wellesley, Mass.)

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Sewing Machines — History  
Wellesley (Mass.)  
Wellesley (Mass.) — History  
Wellesley (Mass.) — Social life and customs  
William Emerson Baker

**System of Arrangement**

This series is arranged into six series all arranged by subject:

- I. Biographical; 1951 – 1960s, undated
- II. Sewing Machine Business; 1850 – 1870, 1971, undated
- III. Written Materials Regarding Ridge Hill Farms or Baker Estate; 1850 – 1970, undated
- IV. Materials from Ridge Hill Farms; 1874 – 1885, undated
- V. Mixed Photographic Materials; bulk undated
- VI. Photographic Prints; bulk undated

**Conditions Governing Access**

The papers are open for research purposes by appointment only. Please contact the Wellesley Historical Society for more information.

[info@wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org)

(781) 235-6690

**Physical Access**

Access to some material is limited due to the fragile condition of the items.

**Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use**

Copyright restrictions may apply.

**Languages and Scripts of the Material**

English

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**

Unknown

W.18

1962.56

1973.26

1982.6.1

1988.72

2000.8.1

2005.9.1

2015.24

**Related Materials**

Wellesley Historical Society; Stereoview Collection: Wellesley Views: Wellesley, Ridge Hill Farms [Baker Estate]

Needham Historical Society

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**Accruals**

The Historical Society may add materials to the Papers in the future; however, no further accruals are currently expected.

**Description**

Processing of this collection was made possible through a grant from the Wellesley Community Preservation Committee.

DACS Finding Aid created by Taylor C. Kalloch in December 2016.

**Bibliography**

Crumbaker, Leslie, G. *The Baker Estate or Ridge Hill Farms of Needham*. Needham, Massachusetts: The Needham Historical Society, Inc., 1975.

Wellesley Conservation Council, Inc. "Sanctuaries," *Guernsey Sanctuary*. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.wellesleyconservationcouncil.org/guernsey-sanctuary.html>

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**Container List**

***I.* Biographical; 1951 – 1960s, undated**

This series contains biographical information pertaining to William Emerson Baker, Richard Greaves, and William O. Grover.

**Box 1**

Folder 1: Baker, General, undated  
Folder 2: Greaves, 1951 & undated  
Folder 3: Grover, c 1960

**Archives Oversize Box 8**

Folder 2: Baker, General; undated

***II.* Sewing Machine Business; 1850 – 1870, 1971, undated**

This series contains materials related to the sewing machine business. The bulk of the series is related directly to the Grover & Baker company, including company advertisements. The series does contain one folder of information regarding the sewing machine business of the 1860s in general.

**Box 1**

Folder 4: General [Not Grover & Baker Specific], 1867 & undated  
Folder 5: Grover & Baker, Advertisements, 1855, 1858, & 1866  
Folder 6: Grover & Baker, Information, 1850s, 1971, & undated

***III.* Written Materials Regarding Ridge Hill Farms or Baker Estate; 1850 – 1970, undated**

This series contains materials regarding Ridge Hill Farms. The bulk of the series is made of research and historical writings concerning the development and decline of Ridge Hill Farms. Also included in the series are newspaper clippings mentioning Ridge Hill Farms and research correspondence.

**Box 1**

Folder 7: Baker Estate; Hotel Wellesley, Walter Pelham (Hotel Wellesley, Krino Park)  
Folder 8: Baker Estate Lecture Outline, undated  
Folder 9: “The Baker Estate, or Ridge Hill Farms of Needham by Leslie G. Crumbaker for The Needham Historical Society, Inc; October 1973”, unbound  
Folder 10: “The Baker Estate, or Ridge Hill Farms of Needham by Leslie G. Crumbaker for The Needham Historical Society, Inc; Town of Needham Bicentennial Publication 1775-1975, published August 1975”, 3 bound copies

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- Folder 11: Baker Estate and Philadelphia Centennial, Materials from  
Folder 12: Baker Estate and Philadelphia Centennial, Research Related to  
Folder 13: "Guides to the Ridge Hill Farms Wellesley, Mass. and Social Science Reform, September, 1877"; large format  
Folder 14: "Guide to the Ridge Hill Farms Wellesley, Mass. and Social Science Reform, September, 1877"; small format; 3 copies

**Box 2**

- Folder 1: Maps, undated  
Folder 2: Newspaper Clippings, 1865-1960s, undated  
Folder 3: Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook, c 1960  
Folder 4: Nina King Lavin Research on Ridge Hill Farms, 1983  
Folder 5: Research Correspondence Regarding Ridge Hill Farms & Baker, 1950s-1980s  
Folder 6: Ridge Hill Farms, General, 1950s-1970s & undated  
Folder 7: Short Writings on Ridge Hill Farms & Baker, 1877 & undated

**Archives Oversize Box 8**

- Folder 3: "Sabrina Lake Sketchbook", Julia Scott Carey; May 6, 2001  
Folder 4: Maps, Flat; undated  
Folder 5: Pre-2003 Baker Estate Exhibit Materials  
Item 1: Maps, Rolled; 1888  
Item 2: Maps, Rolled; undated  
Item 3: Maps, Rolled; undated

**IV. Materials from Ridge Hill Farms; 1874 – 1885, undated**

This series contains materials produced for and distributed by Ridge Hill Farms during its operation. Included are souvenirs, advertisements, and invitations for events held at the property.

**Box 2**

- Folder 8: Bearcamp River House Coach & Other Coaches; bulk undated  
Folder 9: Good Cheer Souvenirs; undated  
Folder 10: Governors' Fete, Thursday; September 20, 1877  
Folder 11: Krino Park Development Company; 1885  
Folder 12: Parties: Billy Bruin & Leanders Funerals; 1874 – 1877, undated

**Archives Oversize Box 8**

- Folder 1: Invitations to Piggery Cornerstone Laying; 1875  
Item 4: Hotel Register; 1883 – 1885

**V. Mixed Photographic Materials; bulk undated**

This series contains mixed photographic materials which depict the various attractions at Ridge Hill Farm.

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**Box 3**

- Folder 1: “Illustrated Guide to the Ridge Hill Farms, Wellesley Mass. & Social Science Reform Part II”; Bound
- Folder 2: 10th Anniversary Invitation [Tin Type, FRAGILE]
- Folder 3: 35mm Slides
- Folder 4: Glass Negatives [FRAGILE]
- Folder 5: Photo Essays; Mixed Negatives

**VI. Photographic Prints; bulk undated**

This series contains photographic prints mainly of the different amusements and buildings at Ridge Hill Farms. Also included are photographs of William Emerson Bakers and Richard Greaves.

**Box 4**

- Folder 1: Baker Summer Home & Barn (426 Grove Street, Dewing House)
- Folder 2: Baker, William Emerson
- Folder 3: Bear Pits
- Folder 4: Belle of Wellesley
- Folder 5: Billy Bruin
- Folder 6: Boston Fire Monument
- Folder 7: Bridges [Coliseum, Rustic, Arboretum?]
- Folder 8: Conservatory & Hot Houses
- Folder 9: Crystal Tower
- Folder 10: Entrance, Norino Tower Complex
- Folder 11: Estate Maps
- Folder 12: Floral Art Garden
- Folder 13: Goat Cart
- Folder 14: Governor Eustace’s Carriage, Bearcamp River House Coach
- Folder 15: Greaves, Richard
- Folder 16: Hotel Wellesley
- Folder 17: Krino Valley
- Folder 18: Lafayette Carriage
- Folder 19: Miscellaneous Scenes
- Folder 20: Peruvian Pavilion (Artificial Fish Pond)
- Folder 21: Porcineograph
- Folder 22: Registry Office
- Folder 23: Sabrina Lake
- Folder 24: Sewing Machine Business
- Folder 25: Smugglers Cove & Save Stalactite Grotto
- Folder 26: Southern Grounds (Windmill, Water Tower, Farm Gardens, “Castle”, Etc.)
- Folder 27: Spray Fountain
- Folder 28: The Grove
- Folder 29: Tripont Island