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KATHRYN B. BROWN
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OTHER VIEWS

Oregon celebrates Edward Baker Day

City, county named after close personal friend and associate of Abe Lincoln

By **TOM EMERY**
To the East Oregonian

Despite his folksy persona, Abraham Lincoln actually kept few close friends. Among them was Edward Dickinson Baker, whom Lincoln named his second son for.

Today, Baker's adopted state of Oregon remembers him with a day in his honor, as February 24 is designated as Edward Baker Day. However, he is often overlooked in Illinois, despite his professional achievements and his relationship with Lincoln.

Baker was born in London on Feb. 24, 1811, and came to America with his Quaker parents at age four. They settled in Philadelphia, where Baker's father founded a school. The family relocated to the Utopian community of New Harmony, Ind., in 1825. From there Baker landed in Carrollton, Ill., an hour north of St. Louis, where he read law with Alfred Caverly, a Massachusetts native who had come to Greene County in 1822. On April 27, 1831, Baker married Mary Ann Lee, a well-to-do 23-year-old widow with two children. Together, they would have five children of their own.

In 1835, Baker was admitted to the bar and that August moved to Springfield, opening a law office. He also threw himself into politics, winning election to two terms in both houses of the Illinois legislature as a Whig. Among his political associates was Lincoln, and a friendly rivalry developed.

Both sought a Congressional seat in 1843, but Sangamon County Whigs selected Baker over Lincoln. Though defeated, Lincoln, a delegate to the nominating convention, had to work for Baker's nomination, laughingly comparing himself to a "groomsman to a man that has cut him out, and is marrying his own dear gal." Despite Lincoln's efforts, Baker lost the nomination.

To prevent against factional splits, the party endorsed Baker for the next convention, and in 1844, he won his desired Congressional seat. But the seat came with a gentleman's agreement, in which Baker would serve his term, then step aside for Lincoln to have his chance at the seat.

On March 10, 1846, Lincoln and wife Mary welcomed their second son, whom they named for Baker. A chronically ill child, Edward Baker Lincoln died on Feb. 1, 1850.

An ardent supporter of "manifest destiny" in his earlier term, Baker declared the proposed split of the Union to be "impossible." Late in his term, he was involved in the construction of a railroad across the Isthmus of Panama.

He remained close friends with Lincoln, despite obvious personality differences. Baker, who spent money as fast as he made it, loved to gamble at cards and drink champagne, all in contrast to Lincoln's frugal, teetotaling ways.

But both were excellent lawyers and saw eye-to-eye on most political matters. Reportedly, the two men engaged in

periodic games of "fives," a form of handball. Baker's stepdaughter, Maria, was married to James Matheny, the best man at Lincoln's 1842 wedding.

Like Lincoln, Baker kept important papers in his hat and possessed great oratorical skills. Longtime Springfield attorney Milton Hay later declared that Baker "was a more brilliant man than Lincoln" but without the "steadfast and reliable ability which Lincoln had."

In 1852, Baker left Illinois for San Francisco and four years later switched to the new Republican Party. He made unsuccessful runs at both a House and Senate seat from California. In late 1859, two old friends from his Illinois days urged him to join them in Oregon, to bolster that state's fledgling Republican base.

In an overwhelmingly Democratic area, Baker needed support from moderate Democrats, as he had in California. As a result, he publicly favored Stephen A. Douglas' popular sovereignty mandate, a break with Lincoln. In 1860, Baker won election to the U.S. Senate, the first Republican to be elected from Oregon.

Still, Baker and Lincoln remained close. The two men rode in Lincoln's carriage in the inaugural parade in March 1861, and Baker introduced Lincoln at his inaugural address. A few days later, Lincoln became visibly annoyed at criticism of Baker leveled by a visiting delegation of California Republicans at the White House.

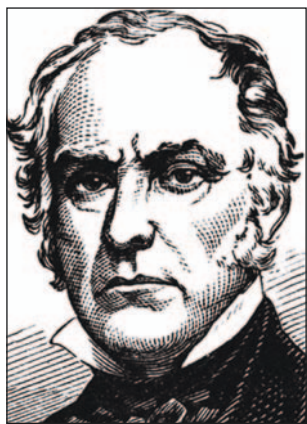
At the outbreak of the Civil War, Baker received authority to raise "a military command to be known as the California Regiment," which was actually recruited in Philadelphia. The recruiting process was made easier by Baker's law partner's distribution of "bad whiskey" to the prospectives. Lincoln offered Baker a commission as brigadier general, but he declined, in order to keep his Senate seat.

Baker was commanding a brigade during a demonstration on the Potomac River in northern Virginia on Oct. 21, 1861, when he was ambushed by Southern forces, sparking the battle of Ball's Bluff. One scholar assessed Baker's actions as "brave but tactically inept." He was killed in the action, becoming the only U.S. Senator to lose his life in a military engagement.

He was buried in San Francisco National Cemetery. The Lincolns were distraught at the loss of their family friend, and ten-year-old Willie Lincoln, the third son of the President, wrote a poem as a memorial to Baker that was published in a Washington newspaper.

Several landmarks across the nation are named in Baker's honor, including a city and county in Oregon, forts in Nevada, California, and the District of Columbia, and a street in San Francisco. A life-sized statue of Baker stands in the U.S. Capitol.

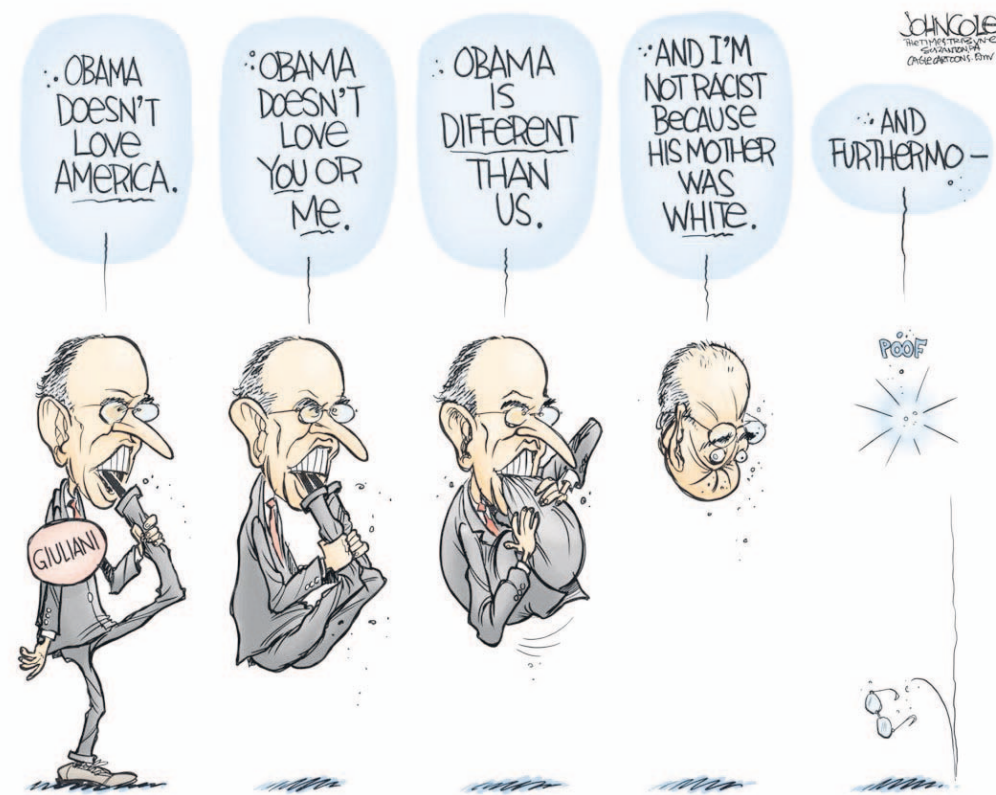
Tom Emery is a freelance writer and historical researcher from Carlinville, Ill. who has written a booklet on the life of Edward Baker Lincoln. He may be reached at ilcivilwar@yahoo.com.



University of South Florida photo
Edward Dickinson Baker

Baker became the first Oregon Republican elected to the U.S. Senate. He later became the first and only sitting senator to be killed in battle.

OTHER VIEWS



Who loves America?

We have arrived at the point where the utter tedium and desperation of personal attacks against President Barack Obama about his life story and his loyalty are no longer news. The histrionics have shed their ability to shock. Most right-minded Americans - ethically speaking, not ideologically speaking - have moved on.

But occasionally the insults prove to be accidentally instructive.

Take for instance what Rudy Giuliani ("America's mayor") said about the president last week at a dinner for Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin (a contender for America's president). At the dinner — attended, according to Politico, by "about 60 right-leaning business executives and conservative media types" — Giuliani said, "I do not believe, and I know this is a horrible thing to say, but I do not believe that the president loves America." He continued, "He doesn't love you. And he doesn't love me. He wasn't brought up the way you were brought up and I was brought up through love of this country."

Yes, Mr. Mayor, it was a horrible thing to say, which is why you backpedaled. On Fox, Giuliani gave a meandering, mealy-mouthed defense of the this vile statement, claiming, preposterously, that "I'm not questioning his patriotism," explaining that he hears Obama "criticize America much more often than other American presidents" and questioning the president's faith in American exceptionalism.

Ah, American exceptionalism again. This is in part about a fundamental difference in views. It is a definitional difference, not about the meaning of love but about the meaning of America and its place in the world. Does exceptionalism — if one accepts the premise — bestow exemption from critique? Is uniqueness perfection? Does our difference require some sort of arresting of development?

As the Pew Research Center pointed out in July, "the view that the U.S. is exceptional — standing above all other countries in the world — has declined 10 points since 2011." At that time last year, 58 percent of Americans believed the United States is "one of the greatest countries in the world, along with others," while only 28 percent believed it "stands above all other countries in the world." (Whether this is truly a measure of exceptionalism or diminished standing isn't completely clear to me.)

And what does it mean to love the country? We're not talking about touristic love of the place — not the mountains and the valleys, the cities and the suburbs, the mighty rivers and



CHARLES BLOW
Comment

the shores that kiss the oceans — but a love of the idea of America.

In a way, this is an ideological battle. Conservatism is rooted in preservation; progressivism advances alteration. These are different love languages. These languages turn on your view of change itself: When you think of America, do you see a country struggling to be maintained or one striving to be made better?

The president not only ran for office on the idea of change, but his presence — in both visage and values — is the manifestation of change. He not only represents a very real affront to the status quo and traditional power but is also not shy about pointing out where America can improve.

Our allegiance needn't — mustn't — be blind to be true. We must acknowledge our warts if we are to proclaim our beauty. Our aggrandizement must be grounded. We must be willing to laud America where it has soared and rebuke it where it has faltered.

America is a great country in many ways. But it is far from perfect. America is a living idea. It isn't only the tenets of its founding, but also the terms of its future. Every day, we make America.

Seeking to preserve and enshrine one vision of this country from one period of its past robs it of what makes it magical: its infinite possibility for adjustment.

"All men are created equal" is an exquisite idea, but one that wasn't fully embraced when the words were written. We, the American people, have pushed this country to consider that clause in the broadest possible interpretation for hundreds of years.

We are engaged in a constant struggle to force America to "be true to what you said on paper," as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. put it.

The concept of forming "a more perfect union" has embedded in it the idea of ambition but not perfection itself. There is room for betterment. America is not static. America is striving.

And sometimes, America requires critique. Jingoism is an avoidance of realism.

You can simultaneously love and be disappointed in the object of your love, wanting it to be better than it is. In fact, that is a measure of love. Honest critique is a pillar of patriotism.

As James Baldwin put it, "I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually."

Charles M. Blow is The New York Times's visual Op-Ed columnist.

YOUR VIEWS

City council made a mess of statue program from the start

I support the Requa statue and made my fair share contribution, but I have to agree with Larry O'Rourke. The whole statue program has been less than transparent. This program is the mayor's dream and from my experience attending the city council meetings, what the mayor wants, the mayor gets.

Now it's been said this new statue has the city council's unanimous support, and when first brought to council that was the case. In a subsequent meeting, when a donation from the city was asked for, support wavered. Though the request was granted, I would hardly call it enthusiastic.

When Dean Fouquette first approached me about the statue, I gladly made a contribution, but warned him then not to get involved with the city and begged him to give back the \$5,000 donation and select a different location. I didn't know at the time that Brownfield Park had been selected because, as the mayor put it, it is the center of many athletic activities. Since I walk through the park daily, about the only athletic activity I've observed are dogs exercising their bowels and bladders, and homeless looking for a place to rest, smoke, and knock down a few cold ones.

The out-of-town letter writing is indeed being pushed by the statue proponents. I mentioned this to the mayor, but he pretty much blew it off as not being relevant. The only way I see of changing the location is a vote by the city council. Remember, the city manager approves the agenda with input from the mayor concerning statue matters. Since the mayor also appointed himself to the Arts Commission — the purse strings — don't expect a vote.

Write to your city council rep and attend the council meetings until they get the point.

When the council spends 45 minutes arguing over a stop sign and then gets "frustrated" by the resentment of the taxpayers at the way this whole statue program has been handled, it just makes me wonder who they really represent.

This whole statue program, though the intentions were good, has been mishandled from the beginning. Those people on Perkins could have easily had a new street for what's been spent on the statues and crosswalks had they spoken up sooner. Then again, until they made their plea at a city council meeting, nobody in city hall cared to listen.

Rick Rohde Pendleton

The more statues the better for Pendleton's Main Street

It is all good! Whether bronze statues are erected on Main Street to honor early Round-Up personalities, a local madam or a noteworthy teacher and coach, all have contributed to Pendleton's colorful and eclectic history.

It has been interesting to read the letters from so many of Don Requa's loyal ex-students, many of whom now reside throughout the country. Some still have family members who live in this area. Even if they do not, since they are demonstrating that they still feel involved with the community.

Presumably these letter writers will attend a dedication, or return to visit another time to see this new representation. Additional tourism is always needed. Acquiring more statues and murals, especially those contributed by dedicated groups who raise money for this purpose, will contribute to a more interesting town. Keep it going, Pendleton!

Dale and Judy Wendt Pendleton

