



We walk in the Footsteps of Generations Past



Workers for the Baker cannery husk sugar corn in the area now known as Baker Street.

Workers' houses are just beyond the white picket fence on the right, and Bakerfield Elementary School was later built on the land on the other side of the fence on the left.

As April graces our calendars once again, we welcome the rain showers and warm spring breeze that bless our hearts and gardens. Decades ago, these very showers played a pivotal role in Aberdeen's agricultural economy, which not only fed the town but thousands of Americans.

Aberdeen was renowned for its bustling canning industry, where locally grown produce was transformed into cans of tomatoes and corn to be shipped to families and soldiers across the United States and around the world. Though Aberdeen's canning industry has faded into history, its legacy lives on in the families and buildings that tell its story. As we take in the sights and scents of spring, let us pause to appreciate Aberdeen's rich canning heritage as its story unfolds in this newsletter.

The following newsletter is a reprint from 2014.



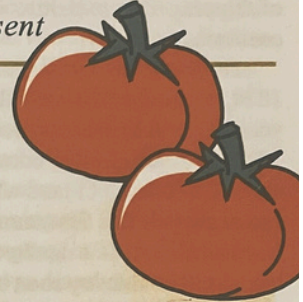
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Our Volunteer Newsletter --- A Link to the Past and Present

A HISTORY OF **The Canning Industry** *in the Aberdeen Area*



by Jim Lindsey

The canned food industry of the late 1800s and early 1900s not only helped preserve food, it was also the forerunner of the convenience food market, which was to service a growing urban population.

Food in cans helped give a year round supply of products to city markets, at a time when people moved from farms to cities in great numbers to work.

The stage was set in 1835 when just west of Halls Cross Roads, the Philadelphia, Baltimore and Wilmington (PB&W) Railroad was constructed. This brought state of the art transportation to the Aberdeen area and a means of economic growth.



Workers in the C. W. Baker corn fields, shortly after the turn of the last century.

During the U. S. Civil War large quantities of food were shipped from Bush Neck and the surrounding farms by railroad from Aberdeen to sustain the Union Forces.

It was at about this time that Baltimore became the center of the canning industry, canning mostly fruits and berries in glass containers and cans.

The Civil War produced a great demand for canned goods. The Armies, particularly those of the North, wanted something better than salted pork or pickled beef. To meet this demand the canning

industry flourished by providing canned fresh meats, fruits, berries and some vegetables, but no canned corn.

George W. Baker was born on a farm west of Aberdeen and at an early age became an apprentice carpenter and wood turner. Later he cut and shipped lumber to manufacturers in Baltimore, and in season carloads of fruit and berries by train.

George built a canning house on his farm, in 1867 and started

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"Canning"

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packing fruit and berries instead of shipping them to Baltimore canneries.

He started to can sugar corn, in 1874, packing 1,000 cases the first year. Eventually he was processing 100,000 cases of sugar corn from about 2,000 acres of land which he had acquired. The first canner in Harford County it is do directly to him that this industry soon became important with Aberdeen as its marketing center.

Early in his twenties George married a Miss Greenland. From this marriage, fifteen children were born, nine of whom survived him. Several years before his death, he turned his business over to his five sons: James B., William B., Charles W, John H., and George A. Baker. Each of the sons then canned separately and became quite successful.

Charles W. Baker, was the only son of G. W. Baker to can in Aberdeen. He built his first canning house along the small stream on Paradise Road. He first packed berries, peaches and tomatoes, but later canned corn exclusively. In 1908 he built a large factory on Bel Air Avenue near the B&O Railroad Station and Yard, and here with better facilities increased his output to 125,000 cases



G.W. Baker soldered tin can, circa 1875. In the early days of canning, tin cans were filled through a small hole in the top. Then a cap was soldered onto it with lead solder. Later, the entire lid was crimped tightly in place, removing the need for solder and making for a healthier product.



This photo of **Baker & Morgan Canned Goods Brokers** was taken on July 4, 1902. Note that the road was simply dirt. The building was located on the north side of (East) Bel Air Avenue, just beyond the PW&B railroad tracks (now AmTrak). Later, the building was sold and received a new stucco face. Some may remember a barber shop located in the building at that time. The structure was razed in 1982 when the AmTrak overpass was built.

Photo courtesy Beulah Baker Collection



per season.

Following the practice of his father, he acquired around 2,000 acres of good corn land upon which he could raise sugar corn year after year without much crop rotation. In addition, he built a brokerage office on the north east corner of West Bel Air Avenue and Parke Street from which he handled his own and goods of other canners.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was constructed through the area, in 1880, paralleling the Pennsylvania Railroad, with a

station being built in 1885 in Aberdeen. This insured the economic development of the area making it a transportation and shipping hub for the area.

The First National Bank of Aberdeen was organized in 1891, as a result of the canning industry. There was a need for a local financial institution, with sufficient resources to finance the increasing amount of business development in the community.

The Continental Can Company established a factory near the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad making cans for the canning houses in the area, in 1893. The cans were largely hand made by forming the coated steel into a cylinder then soldering the side seams, the bottom and the top which contained a small filler hole. When filled the cap was closed

also with solder. This method of manufacture and sealing introduced lead into the product and also resulted in much spoilage. It was not until about 1900 that the modern can

building in Aberdeen, Maryland then passed into the hands of Morgan Mitchell.

Many other prominent families or individuals who canned in or near

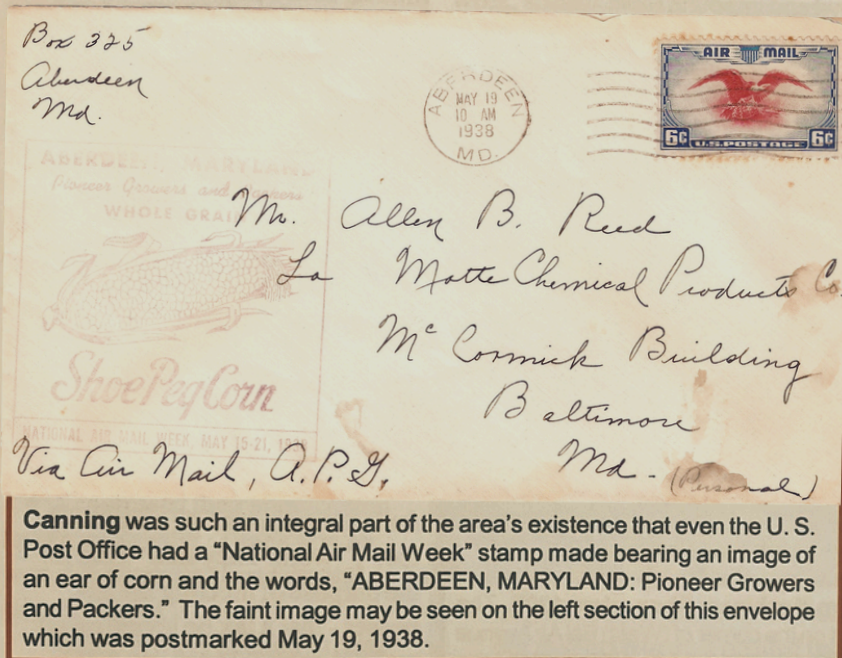
Maryland, over the years.

In 1903, the firm of Strasbaugh, Steckle and Hevett opened a brokerage office on West Bel Air Avenue next to the Odd Fellows building to finance local canners and market their products. William Silver bought the half interest of Steckle and Hevett forming the Strasbaugh & Silver Company, in 1905. This company was dissolved in 1911 and William Silver continued the original office and H. P. Strasbaugh formed a new company with an office immediately below the Pennsylvania Railroad and built and operated a canning house on Route 40 where Wawa is now located.

After Aberdeen's great fire of 1918 with his building destroyed, William Silver and Company relocated to their new building at 115 West Bel Air Avenue, that eventually became the home of S. W. Sisk and Sons.

In 1919 Strasbaugh ceased canning but maintained the brokerage office.

The acquisition of many acres of good corn land by the U. S. Government and the continued urbanization of lower Harford County reduced the canning industry, which was once so vital in earlier days to Aberdeen and Harford County, Maryland. ●



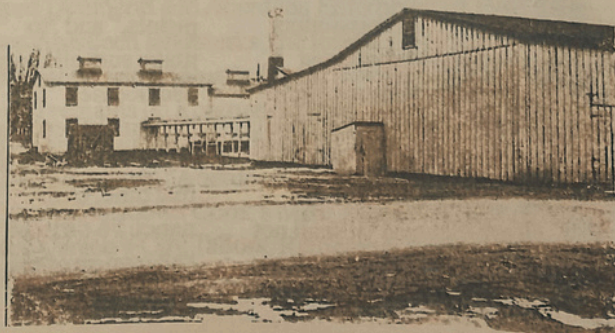
Canning was such an integral part of the area's existence that even the U. S. Post Office had a "National Air Mail Week" stamp made bearing an image of an ear of corn and the words, "ABERDEEN, MARYLAND: Pioneer Growers and Packers." The faint image may be seen on the left section of this envelope which was postmarked May 19, 1938.

with doubled rolled, double crimped top and bottom, was introduced, lined with a harmless coating.

The U. S. Government began acquiring the farmland of Bush and Gunpowder Necks, in 1917. By 1918 all land had been acquired and the inhabitants moved, some of whom were descendants of the early settlers. Many of those deprived of their ancestral lands moved to Aberdeen or bought farms elsewhere in Harford County. Within this area was 1300 acres belonging to C. W. Baker. After disposing of most of his land, he retired and turned the brokerage business and the management of the three packing houses in Delaware owned by his three sons: P. Tevis, Frank E., and A. Lynn Baker. They continued the business until the death of P. Tevis and Frank E. Baker. The canning house

Aberdeen should also be mentioned. These are the Mitchells, the Osborns, the Wrights, J. W. Michael, Alfred H. Wilson, Edward V. Stockham and H. P. Strasbaugh. Bernie Bodt, a frequent visitor to the Aberdeen Room and local canning authority has found 700 canneries that operated in Harford County,

The Baker / Mitchell cannery is in the distance on the left; warehouse is on the right. The cannery still stands on the corner of W. Bel Air Avenue and Baker Street.



Corn Pudding

By Mrs. James B. Baker (Frances "Fanny" Richardson Baker, 1846-1920), wife of one of Aberdeen's canners of corn.

Original Recipe: Scrape the corn from the cob (6 or 8 ears). Add a well-beaten egg and enough fresh milk to thin it; add butter, salt and pepper. Pour into a dish and bake. When using canned corn, drain the water from the corn and use more milk and egg.



Ingredients

- 2 c. whole kernel corn
- *(If fresh: Cooked & cut from cob; or Canned & drained; or Frozen & thawed)*
- 3 eggs, *(whisked)*
- 2 c. milk *(scalded)*
- 1½ T. butter
- 1 tsp. sugar
- ¾ to 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper

- **Optional Add-Ins:**
- ¼ c. onion *(minced)*
- 2 T. green pepper *(finely-chopped)*
- 2 T. pimento *(finely-cut)*
- ½ c. ham *(cut small)*



Instructions

1. Scald milk. *(Scalding the milk makes a smoother custard.)* To scald, pour milk into a medium saucepan with a thick bottom. Heat and stir over medium heat until small bubbles form around the edge and milk starts to give off steam. Remove pan from heat; allow to cool until milk reaches 110°F.
2. Add butter to milk, allowing it to melt.
3. While milk is cooling:
 - Grease a 1½ quart casserole.
 - Locate a shallow pan that is a little larger than the casserole to use later in the baking process.
 - Whisk eggs in medium-small bowl; whisk in sugar, salt, and pepper.
 - Pre-heat oven to 325-degrees F.
4. Temper the eggs. When the milk has cooled sufficiently, add a small amount of scalded milk to the eggs and whisk vigorously; repeat several times. Add egg mixture to remaining scalded milk, whisking to thoroughly blend.
5. *(Optional):* Stir in add-ins.
6. Pour into a greased 1½ quart casserole.
7. Set in water bath. Partially fill shallow pan with hot tap water. Set casserole in pan to test water height. (It should rise to about 1-inch or so.) Remove casserole from water. Carefully set pan of water on middle rack in oven; set casserole into water bath.
8. Bake at 325-degrees for 55-60 minutes or until set and a knife comes out clean when inserted halfway between center and edge of baking dish.
9. Very carefully remove casserole and water bath from oven; set on rack to cool slightly, about 10 minutes. Carefully lift casserole from water. *(Use water-proof silicone oven mitts, if possible; may wish to suction out some of the hot water with a turkey baster before removing casserole.)*

Enjoy!

You can find this recipe and many other delicious ones in the Aberdeen Museum Library.



Ask Mr. History

Q What was the original use of the building at 115 W. Bel Air?

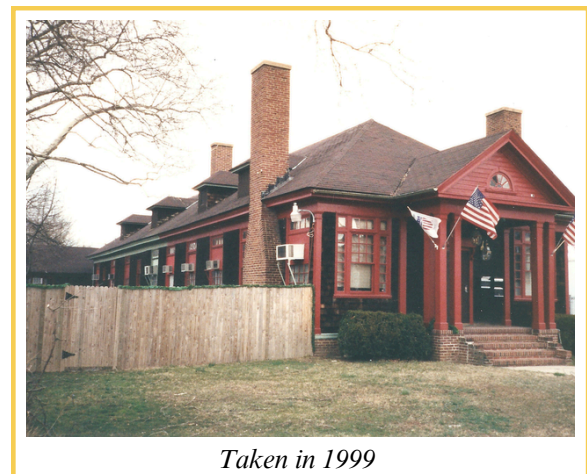
A & The craftsman-style building was originally constructed in the early 20th century to house offices for one of Aberdeen's canning brokers, at a time when Aberdeen had gained a position of prominence in that field.

Before the Great Fire of 1918, the food brokerage firm of William Silver & Co., Inc. occupied the second floor of the 3-story Odd Fellows Building, which was located on the corner of Bel Air Avenue and what is now Rt. 40. After the Great Fire took their building, they relocated to 115 W. Bel Air Avenue.

At the height of its operations, William Silver & Co., Inc. owned eight canneries, financed 25 commissioned packers, and sold for many independent canners on a brokerage basis. Aberdeen's own William Silver aided in the formation of the National Canners Association, served as Chairman of the Industry War Price Committee on Canned Goods during World War I, and after the War helped organize and served as President of the Tri-State Packers Association.

In 1928, William Silver's brokerage business was turned over to his sons. In 1941, they moved the office and business to Cecil County Maryland. The former offices of William Silver & Co. at 115 W. Bel Air Avenue then housed a branch office of A. W. Sisk & Son of Preston (Eastern Shore), Maryland. The firm continued to operate its canning brokerage from that location for many years.

Today, the century-old building stands as a monument to the prominence and glory days of Aberdeen's canning legacy.



Do you have a question about the history of the Greater Aberdeen Area? We may answer it in an upcoming newsletter. Email questions to info@aberddeenmuseum.org with "Ask Mr. History" in the subject line.

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