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DAVID BARKER

"The Burns of Maine"

BY

JOHN FRANCIS SPRAGUE

DAVID BARKER

"The Burns of Maine"

AND THE

BARKER FAMILY OF EXETER AND BANGOR, MAINE

By

John Francis Sprague

Reprint from Sprague's Journal of Maine History, Vol. III, No. 4.

(Limited edition of 50 copies)

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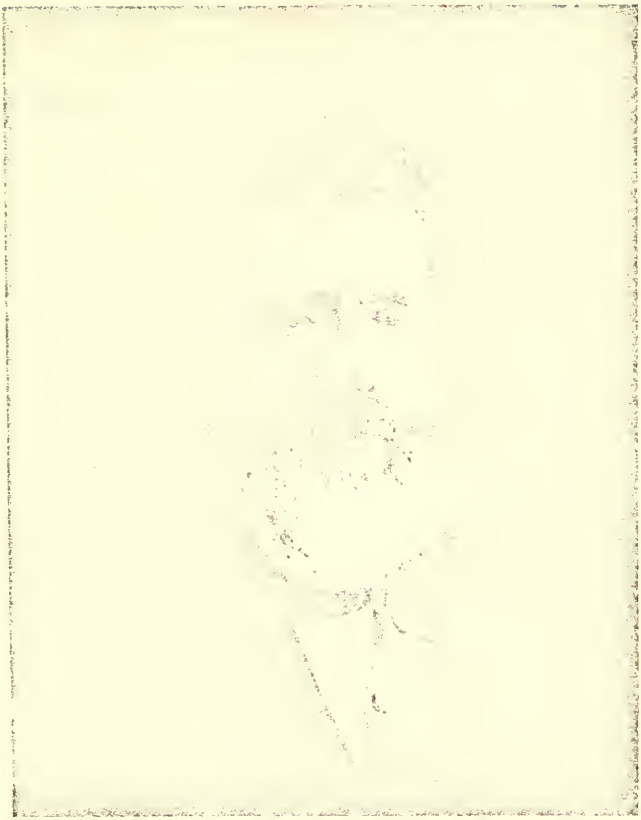

Very truly

Your obt Servant

David Barker

A 990

David Barker "The Burns of Maine" and the Barker Family of Exeter and Bangor, Maine

The following sketch of the Barker family of Exeter and Bangor, Maine, is taken from The Bangor Historical Magazine,[1] and was written by its editor, the late Honorable Joseph W. Porter.

Nathaniel Barker was the son of Daniel Barker, born in Exeter, N. H. The family moved to Limerick, Me., in 1776 and from thence to what is now Exeter, Maine, 1803-8. Nathaniel Barker married Sally, daughter of Joseph Pease,[2] 1806. March 18, 1823, Mr. Barker came to Bangor with an ox team and load of wood and at a point near Currier's tannery on the Levant road he got caught and fell under the sled and was instantly killed.

The story of the struggles of the widow to bring up her family of nine children has been familiar wherever the Barker family are known, and their reputation is widespread. Mrs. Barker died at the old homestead, January 6, 1880, aged 91. Their children were:

i. NOAH, b. Nov. 14, 1807; Representative, Senator, Land Agent, County Commissioner; m. Temperance B., daughter of William and Rachel (Knapp) Eddy, of Eddington, Dec. 29, 1839. She was born Feb. 9, 1815. He d. 1888. Four children.

ii. MELINDA H., b. July, 1809; m. Thomas J. Hill of Exeter; she d. 188—; eight children.

iii. JULIA B., b. Mar. 12, 1811; m. Elijah Crane, of Exeter. He d. 1873; she d. 1882; several children, all d. without issue.

iv. SARAH B., b. Sept. 30, 1812; m. Rev. Eldridge G. Carpenter about 1836. She died in Newcastle; no children. He m. again; d. at Houlton, April 3, 1867, aged 55.

Me., 178—, and from thence to Exeter, Me., 1808.

v. NATHANIEL, b. Nov. 27, 1814, of Exeter; m. Elvira C. Grinnell of Exeter; six children.

vi. DAVID, b. Sept. 1816, of Exeter; m. Susan Chase of Belfast; representative, 1873; lawyer and poet; d. 1874. Two children.

vii. LEWIS, b. Feb. 18, 1818; ———, Bangor.

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(1) The Bangor Historical Magazine, Vol. 6, p. 77.

(2) Joseph Pease was born in New Market, N. H., moved to Parsonsfield,

viii. DANIEL, b. 1820, married Lydia, of Joshua Chamberlain, of Exeter. Resides in Bangor. Three children.

ix. MARK, b. Sept., 1822; married Julia A. McCobb of Orrington, she died 1882. He now resides in Houlton. Several children all dead.

x. JOHN,——

LEWIS BARKER.

Born Feb. 18, 1818. Educated in the schools of Exeter, and Foxcroft Academy. School master, studied law with Albert G. Jewett, and Kent & Cutting. Admitted to the Bar, 1841, and settled in Stetson. Removed to Bangor in 1871. Eventually his firm became Barker, Vose & Barker. Hon. T. W. Vose, and his son Lewis A. Barker comprising the firm. He was a Representative, 1864 and 1867. Speaker, 1867; Senator, 1865-1866; Executive Councilor, 1880, and for several years after. He was a member of the State Board of Health, and of the commission to enlarge the State House. He was Past Master of Pacific Lodge of F. A. M., of Exeter, and a member of Royal Arch Chapter, and St. John's Commandery of Knights Templar. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Col. Francis and Elizabeth (Wasson) Hill of Exeter, Aug. 2, 1846, by Rev. Elbridge G. Carpenter. Mrs Barker now resides in Bangor. Mr. Barker, died Oct. 9, 1890, his death having been caused by a runaway horse, near his own house. Mr. Barker was a character well known in this State and in many places out of the State. His fame as an advocate and a political speaker, reached far beyond the State where he lived. Their children were:

i. EVVIE, b. May 11, 1848. She was a woman of great natural ability She was twice married, and died Nov. 3, 1872, leaving a daughter.

ii. LEWIS AMASA, b. Aug. 12, 1854. He attended Union College at Schenectady, N. Y., and the Albany Law School. He commenced the practice of the law with his father, and later of the firm of Barker, Vose & Barker. He was a young man of fine abilities and good legal mind. He was a representative, 1887-89. He was a leading man in the order of Knights of Pythias, and held its highest office in this State. He d. in Boston, whither he had gone for medical treatment, Jan. 16, 1890. He m. Margaret, daughter of the late Moses L. Appleton, Oct. 14, 1875. They had two children, a son Lewis A., and a daughter.

Some of the descendants of Nathaniel Barker were among the most prominent men of Maine. Among them his seventh son, Honorable Lewis Barker, mentioned in the foregoing article, was a lawyer of note and attained much reputation as an eloquent stump speaker in the ranks of the Republican party. He possessed a magnetic personality and had an original and somewhat picturesque style of oratory which attracted the masses.

In the early days of that party he was often called to speak not only in every part of Maine but in many other states of the Union.

Lewis A. Barker, Jr., son of Lewis A. Barker, mentioned in the same article, is also a lawyer who was born in Bangor and is now

residing in Boston, Massachusetts. He attained a state wide reputation a few years ago when he was associated as counsel with the late Honorable Josiah Crosby, in obtaining the pardon of Stain and Cromwell, who were sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of John Wilson Barron, treasurer of the Dexter Savings Bank, and who were pardoned by Governor Llewellyn Powers.

His sixth son, David Barker, was born in Exeter, Maine, September 9, 1816, and died September 14, 1874. He entered the profession of law and during nearly all of his professional life practiced law in a little old fashioned law office at Exeter Corner, which still exists and a picture of which accompanies this sketch. In the days of the old stage coaches and "tote" teams this village was a stage center and a trading place of importance. Samuel Cony, afterwards Governor of Maine, practiced law there for some years and David was for a time a student in his office.

The home of David Barker at Exeter Corner, Maine, taken in 1915.

David Barker is, however, best known to the world as a poet, and for many years while living, enjoyed the honor of being designated in the press and among the people of his state both as the "Bard of Exeter" and "The Burns of Maine." And his poetical fame brought to him the degree of A. M. from Bowdoin College.

There have been a few of Maine's writers of note who have beautifully and accurately described the quaint manners and cus-

tons, the language and sayings and the rugged life of our sturdy ancestors, who were the pioneers of the Pine Tree State. Among such were Seba Smith, who wrote under the *nom de plume* of "Major Jack Downing" and acquired much reputation and popularity in criticizing President Jackson's administration; Holman Day, Maine's most famous author; and George Cleveland's recent delightful book "Maine in Verse and Story" may properly find a place in this class of Maine literature. But none have ever surpassed David Barker in his delineation of the yankee character as known in Maine's early days. His poetry flowed from a heart full of love for all humanity especially the oppressed in every clime or condition in life. Hence in the anti bellum days we find his voice mingling with the voices of Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Longfellow and other American poets of that day in a protest against American slavery.

One of his earliest poems referred to the celebrated fugitive slave case in Massachusetts entitled "A Few Words from Maine to Massachusetts about the Burns Case" which commenced with these stirring lines:

"Massachusetts, God forgive her,
She's kneeling 'mong the rest,
She that ought to have clung forever
In her grand old eagle-nest."

Is water running in your veins?
Have ye no pluck at all;
What, stand and see a gyve put on
In sight of Faneuil Hall.

For many a long and tedious year
We've heard your people tell
About a little rise of land,
Where Joseph Warren fell.

Oh, brag no more about that spot,
Let every tongue be still.
But scratch the name of BUNKER out,
And call it "Buncombe" Hill.

And then "To John Brown In Prison" the first lines of which were:

Stand firm, John Brown, till your fate is o'er,
For the world, with an anxious eye,
Looks on as it seldom has looked before,
While the hour of your doom draws nigh—
Stand firm
John Brown,
Stand firm!

But his poetical career really begun when about the year 1854 he sent to the New York Evening Post the following stanzas which were published.

MY CHILD'S ORIGIN.

One night, as old Saint Peter slept,
He left the door of Heaven ajar,
When through, a little angel crept,
And came down with a falling star.

One summer, as the blessed beams
Of morn approached, my blushing bride
Awakened from some pleasing dreams,
And found that angel by her side.

God grant but this—I ask no more—
That when he leaves this world of sin,
He'll wing his way for that blest shore,
And find the door of Heaven again.

The lines immediately attracted attention and were copied extensively into the newspaper press throughout the country. Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, was so impressed by them that he carried them with him, affirming that they were "the sweetest lines he ever read."

Among others of Barker's productions which attracted a wide circle of admirers were "The Old Ship of State;" "The Under Dog in the Fight;" "The Covered Bridge;" The Empty Sleeve;" etc. His longest poem was "My First Courtship" and his biographer expresses the belief that this "will be the most enduring." This is undoubtedly true for in it appears some of his most charming descriptions of the folk lore of olden times in Maine, and all through it a droll humor happily mingles with pathos.

"Old Willey," one of his patriotic and most virile songs was the story of a common laborer at Exeter Corner who worked at odd jobs to earn a living for his little family.

He laid the wall, and he sawed the wood
For me and others in the neighborhood.

. . . . . .

One day to my village two men rode down—
Yes, they came over from Stetson town.

One was named Hill[3] and the other Plaisted.[4] They were enlisting officers and had come there to procure volunteers for the Union army. When they rode into town

This Willey and I were standing o'er
(He sawing wood) near my office door.

The flag of the Union was waving to the breeze and a crowd were listening to the eloquence of the enlisting officers when

A neighbor of mine was standing nigh,—
With his traitor lips to the startled air
He hissed the flag that was floating there.

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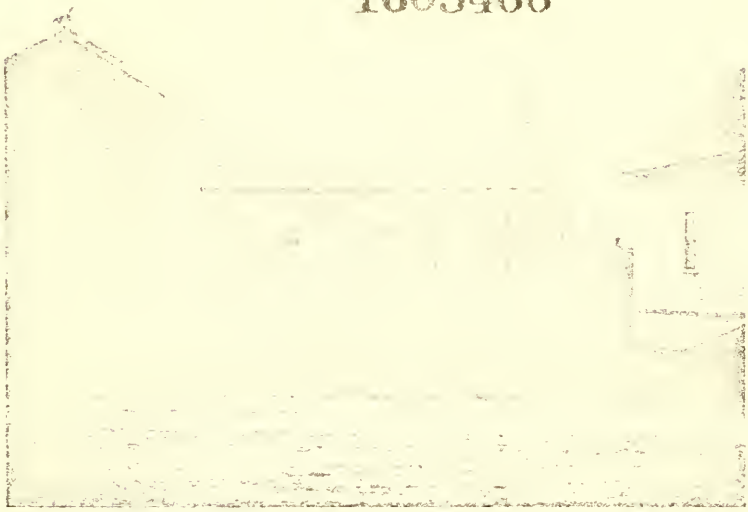

"This Willey and I were standing o'er
(He sawing wood) near my office door"

The old Barker office at Exeter Corner, Maine, as it appears today.

This enraged old Willey and aroused the fire of patriotism burning in his heart, and he swore then and there with a fearful oath that he would enlist in the army and go down to the southland and fight the traitors.

And he *did* enlist, for the brave old soul,
With his name on the gallant Plaisted's roll,
For the cast of a die, for a loss or gain,
With the gory, famed old 11th of Maine.

(*) General John A. Hill who first enlisted as Captain of Company K, 11th Maine Regiment at a public meeting in Stetson, Maine.

(*) General Harris M. Plaisted who first enlisted as Lieutenant Colonel of the 11th Maine Regiment. He was Attorney General of Maine, 1873-5; Congressman 1873; Governor 1881-2. He was the father of Honorable Frederick W. Plaisted who was also Governor of Maine, 1911-12.

Old Willey was a brave soldier in many battles and survived to return home maimed and feeble.

With his folded arms he lies so still
In a cold, sound sleep on the "Crowell Hill".
I wish I knew if he felt the least
As he felt when our Father's flag was hissed;
For he slumbers there 'neath a beetling crag
By the side of the one who hissed the flag.

A sound, and well defined philosophy of life runs through his verse, for instance, in "A Solace for Dark Hours:"

Fear not the man of wealth and birth,
Securely re-ting in his seat,
But sooner him, who, crushed to earth,
Is rising to his feet.

That he believed fully in an overruling Providence and a life beyond death is evidenced in his every line, but his religion was for all humanity as is especially made evident in "The Covered Bridge" and other poems.

But we all pass over on equal terms,
For the Universal toll,
Is the outer garb, which the hand of God
Has flung around the soul.
Though the eye is dim, and the bridge is dark,
And the river it spans is wide,
Yet faith points through to a shining mount,
That looms on the other side.

That his views of a life beyond were such as would today class him with those known as "Spiritualists," may be adduced from his writings and especially from a letter written to his brother Lewis, July 7, 1874, from which the following is taken:

I shall do my best to live here below a while longer, but the chances look doubtful. Should we not meet again, do what you think best with the songs I have sung here, and I promise you one from beyond at the earliest possible hour, and from a harp attuned by your angel daughter Evvie, if I can find her upon the same plane upon which I am permitted to enter, with the lingering earth stains which may be found upon me.

One of the most charming features of the first edition of Barker's Poems is a letter in rhyme in the Scotch dialect, written and sent to him some years before his death, by Edward Wiggin, Jr., of Fort

Fairfield, Maine, entitled "Epistle to Davie." Although when written it was only intended for the perusal of the author of "My Child's Origin," yet it is of itself a sweet song and very properly inserted in that little volume.

Mr. Wiggin in his lifetime was a well known character in our State and for many years closely identified with the political, business and educational interest of the State of Maine. He acquired quite a reputation as a platform lecturer; the best known and most popular of his productions was probably his lecture entitled "Mince Pie As My Mother Made It."

And now we close this rambling sketch about a great Maine poet with verses from his "Influence and Retribution," which all writers of high or low degree should remember and emulate:

Ye cannot send the simplest line
    Abroad from off your pen,
But ye must meet, in future hour,
    That very line again.

The slightest word ye cannot speak
    Within a mortal ear,
But that the echo of such word
  Ye must forever hear.

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