Remembering Charles W. Baker

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/george_h_baker/40/
Remembering Charles W. Baker
Remembering Charles Baker – Welcome!

Many of us remembering Charles Baker as students might recall the figure of a gentle man quietly navigating the halls of Aberdeen High School; an individual who preferred to blend in rather than attract any degree of unwanted attention. Others, who had the privilege to have taken a step deeper into his life space, discovered any notion of perceived timidity quickly was replaced by a burning passion for the arts, which he exuberantly practiced. This enthusiasm along with patient understanding, a love of family, community and country coalesced to form his gifted teaching method. And then there were the musicians, from beginner to accomplished, that were inspired to excel and who filled classrooms, auditoriums and football halftime shows with song and celebration, who might recall as part of their musical experience Chuck’s “signature lead in” that started many a song with the familiar toe tapping, fingers snapping and head shaking side to side. Despite the absence of national fame, to Chuck’s band and orchestra members, his lead-in was every bit as memorable as Lawrence Welk’s baton or Mitch Miller’s flailing elbows and twin “OK” sign hand gestures.

In whatever manner we choose to recount the life of Charles Winfield Baker, it is certain he should be remembered as the best, most recent example of an individual who gave so much for so many, and passed quietly away from our conscious view. Few may recognize the extent of his contributions to the town of Aberdeen, the County of Harford, or the State of Maryland – even fewer would suspect that, despite his often quiet demeanor, he was a wartime P51 and F84 fighter pilot. And, as is life, none will ever measure the influence he had on the quality of our life or in the lives of our progeny. Thank you Charles!

Please take a moment to peruse the related articles on this site to reflect on the victorious life of Charles Winfield Baker and then celebrate with us, the Aberdeen High School Class of 1970 and State of Mind Band, by making a personal contribution for the purpose of supporting the Aberdeen High School band department and the legacy that began with Charles W. Baker. And thank you for taking the moment of your busy day to share.

Best Regards,
Billy D Sissom Jr.
G. Harold Baker
In Memory of Charles Winfield Baker
9 February 1921 - 10 January 2010

Charles W. (Chuck) Baker was a native and life-long resident of Aberdeen. Chuck grew up attending Aberdeen public schools and graduated from Aberdeen High School. He attended Western Maryland College until he entered the U.S. Air Force Flight Training School in 1942. After completing his pilot training, he served during World War II as a First Lieutenant until he was honorably discharged in 1946. He served in the reserves until called back to active duty during the Korean War in 1951. He flew the P51 and the F84 fighter aircraft.

Chuck taught in the Harford County Public School System for 26 years, beginning with Industrial Arts. He was an avid woodworker and tennis player. But his primary lifelong professional and avocational interest was music. Chuck played in dance bands starting in high school. He perfected his skills studying instrumental music at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. His primary instruments were trumpet and woodwinds. He earned his degree in Instrumental Music Education at Towson and began his academic career teaching instrumental music for grades 9-12 at the Aberdeen High School. He completed his music teaching career teaching music at the Aberdeen Elementary Schools. While at Aberdeen High School he was known for his excellent marching band and their football half-time shows and the professional sound of his select dance band ensemble.

He was noted for his interest in his students’ lives and the kind and patient approach that he brought to the music learning process. Several of his students went on to successful professional music careers. He led the Aberdeen High School summer band program for many years. He formed and led the Chuck Baker Orchestra enlisting the talents of many exceptional “Big Band” musicians from Harford County. His orchestra was well known and played for many local and State events over the last 50 years. Chuck also organized the Aberdeen Fire Department Band which won many awards in the annual State-wide competition at Ocean City. Beginning in the 1980’s, he organized the Aberdeen Summer Concert Series for the Harford County Department of Parks and Recreation who later awarded him for 25 years of volunteer service. In his later years he was a member of the Bel Air Community Band. Chuck was a founder of HARCO (The Harford County Teachers Association Credit Union). He was a charter member and served as a long-time volunteer with The Aberdeen Room Museum group. In 2003 he received the Aberdeen Rotary Club’s Citizenship Award.

We honor Chuck for his service to the Aberdeen High School and the larger Aberdeen and Harford County community. His musical legacy lives on in the lives his students, and the tremendous musical enjoyment over many years he provided by organizing and directing local bands, and his unselfish community service. He has touched many lives in Aberdeen and the larger Harford County community. We also honor his wife, Barbara Harward Baker for her faithful support and service alongside Chuck in every endeavor.
Meet the Teacher

Industrial Education Open House Displays Craftsmanship Of Students

Exhibits of Carving, Iron Work, Sketching, Drawing Displayed

An open house of the Industrial Education Department will be held today in the shop behind the Horticulture Building from noon until 9:30 p.m., according to Charles Baker, student chairman of the affair.

The exhibits will be in the foundry and machine departments where the complete process of forming castings, using lathes, milling machines, shapers, and planers will be shown. Baker, a senior in industrial education, said that souvenir sets (trays with silkscreen designs) will be given to everyone. There will be snacks served at the entrance during the exhibition.

There will be an exhibit of metalworking projects done by students, as well as samples of art, metal craftsmanship, wrought iron work, stenciling, architectural and machine drawing, internal curling of metal, and the tile screen process.

The event will be open to students and faculty members.

Charles Baker Returns

Mr. Charles Baker has returned to Aberdeen High School after an absence of three years. He taught Industrial Arts in the junior and senior high school during 1949 and 1950. Before returning to teaching field, Mr. Baker was a draftsman at Aberdeen Proving Ground. His former employment also included work as a Man in the United States Army Air Corps, and he has been a member of the United States Army Air Corps since 1949.

Mr. Baker teaches in the Department of Agriculture at Aberdeen High School. He is a graduate of Aberdeen High School and a member of the Class of 1949. He has been a member of the American Legion Post 16 since 1949. He is a member of the Aberdeen High School Booster Club and a member of the Aberdeen High School Parent-Teacher Association. He is also a member of the Aberdeen High School Music Boosters.

Aberdeen School News

Meet the Teacher

Charles W. Baker

For permanent residents of Aberdeen, Charles W. Baker does not need to be identified. His family is well-known. He, himself, graduated from Aberdeen High School in the days, not so very long ago, when everyone in town knew practically everyone else. Those who were in school at the time seldom took for granted the good old days, to include in their memories the dance orchestra which had Chuckie Baker on the trumpet, his vocalist George H. Baker, Jr., at the piano, Berle, Riddle at the drums, and others.

This year, once again, Aberdeen High School’s dance orchestra, led by Mr. Baker, is making a name for itself in the county.

During the first year he has taught at the high school, Mr. Baker has divided his teaching hours between Industrial Arts and instrumental music. In this period the school has developed its first

1949 – Industrial Arts at AHS

Instrumental Music, 1956
Meet the Pilot

Charles Baker – WWII Fighter Pilot, B29 Flight Engineer
Aberdeen High School Marching Band
25th Anniversary, 1962-63

In 1963, AHS Band celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Formed in 1938 under the guidance of Mrs. Willard, it had an initial membership of only fifteen players. This number increased to fifty-five under the direction of Mr. Charles W. Baker, one of the organization's charter members. The Band is an integral part of school activity. Spirit and vitality characterize the band as it marches at football games or whips up spirit at pep rallies. It is at its best when performing in varied and intricate formations during Homecoming weekend. More than a marching band, however, it presents concerts at May Day, school assemblies, and the annual Spring Concert.

Under the supervision of Mr. Baker and the drum-major, Richard Keese, the 1962-'63 Band had one of its most memorable seasons.

The dance band is in its eighth year at Aberdeen High. Aside from its schedule of practices and playing for school dances, the dance band has made guest appearances at other schools and contracted outside dance jobs.

It is the purpose of the organization to provide wholesome musical entertainment and to provide for the advancement of technique. It has become an outlet for superior musical ability. The members of the organization take their work seriously, and many intend to make a career in dance band.

Highlighting the ensemble this year are the talented drummer, Carroll Shnitt, who performs locally with one of the "rock-and-roll" combos and whose solos have become a tradition with the group; and Bill Tarbert, a member of the "Blue Notes," who is outstanding on the alto sax.
Retirement, 1977

Havre de Grace Record

Charles Baker Retires After Teaching in Aberdeen Schools for 26 Years

Charles Baker retires after teaching in Aberdeen Schools for 26 years. He is a graduate of Aberdeen High School and went to Western Maryland College. After completing two years of college, he enlisted in the Air Force as an aviation cadet and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant and received his wings as a single engine pilot. He served briefly as a flight instructor and later as a flight engineer on a B-29 bomber crew.

Charles Baker of Aberdeen is seen on the last day at Hall’s Cross Roads Elementary School, where he taught instrumental music. He divided his time between Oakington Elementary School and Hillsdale Elementary School, besides Hall’s Cross Roads School. This ends a career of 26 years for Charles Baker.

After World War II, Charles returned to college at the University of Maryland and graduated in 1949 with a B.S. degree in education. He started teaching the same year in the Old Aberdeen High School located on Route 46. Once again his career was interrupted by the Korean War when he joined the 125th Fighter Bomber Wing stationed in Manston, England under the command of NATO. Later, Baker was joined in England by his wife, Barbara and daughter Patricia, while undergoing training flying F-84 Thunderjets.

In 1952, the Bakers returned to Aberdeen and Mr. Baker assumed leadership of the newly formed high school band program. This program included Concert Band, Marching Band, Pep Band and Stage Band. When the Junior High School was built, he transferred there and taught instrumental music until just before the students and faculty moved into the new Middle School.

At the time of his retirement Charles Baker was teaching instrumental music at Oakington, Hall’s Cross Roads and Hillsdale Elementary Schools. In his 26 years of teaching, Mr. Baker has taught in all the schools of Aberdeen except Aberdeen Middle School.

In addition to his work as a teacher, Mr. Baker found time to serve as Assistant Director of the Aberdeen Firemen’s Band and presently leads the Chuck Baker Orchestra which is well known for its “big band sound.”

Mr. & Mrs. Charles Baker

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 1977

Retiring Charles Baker Honored At Oakington

The faculty of Oakington Elementary School honored Charles W. Baker at a retirement dinner at the Bayou Restaurant. The faculty, represented by Chris Corcoran, presented him with a beautiful suit valise. Mrs. Pamela Lord, on behalf of the PTA, presented him with an eclectic drill and saw.

Mr. Baker began his career as an industrial arts teacher in the old Aberdeen High School on Route 46. Due to his love and excellence on reed instruments, he was asked to direct the Aberdeen High School Band. After years of study, Mr. Baker became fully certified in the field of music. He organized and still leads the well-known Chuck Baker Orchestra which specializes in big band era music. His love of music and personal interest in his students personified his outstanding career. He was an active member of the Aberdeen Fireman’s Band.

Mr. Baker also taught at the Aberdeen Middle School; at present he teaches instrumental music at Oakington, Hall’s Cross Roads and Hillsdale Elementary School.

He was a founder of Harco - the Harford County Teachers Association’s Credit Union. He is currently and has been since its inception, an active member of the board of directors. He and his wife, Barbara, live in Aberdeen. Their son, Neil, is a student at Harford Community. Patty, their daughter, lives and works in Baltimore.
And now, from high atop the Officers’ Club at APG, the melodic, big band sounds of Chuck Baker and his band of renown

By Brandon Griggs

For those who grew up tapping their toes to the music of Glenn Miller or Tommy Dorsey, it’s not easy finding live big band music around Harford County anymore.

In fact, if it weren’t for the Chuck Baker Orchestra, it would be impossible. Baker’s orchestra is the only one playing big band music in Harford County, and one of the very few in the state.

If you’re over the age of 40, and have spent any time in the Harford County area, chances are you have heard Chuck Baker play.

Born and raised in Aberdeen, Baker has been playing big band music in Harford County for more than 40 years. For the past 30 or so years, Baker, with his 18-piece band, has been playing private parties, weddings, and anniver-
saries all over eastern Maryland.

Today, at 63, he shows no signs of slowing down. His band, coming off an especially busy holiday season, is as popular as ever, Baker says. On Friday night, the musicians played for a dance at the Harford Day School, and on New Year’s Eve, they performed to an appreciative crowd at the Aberdeen Proving Ground Officer’s Club.

They really seemed to enjoy us last night,” Baker said on New Year’s Day. “I think that would have stayed until four in the morning if the club had been open that long.”

Baker began his musical training at an early age. As a teenager, he and his peers going to the theater in Baltimore and sitting through the same movie over and over just to hear the Glenn Miller orchestra that played live between shows.

At a student, he played trumpet in the Aberdeen High School band, and later picked up the saxophone, playing in a cadet band in the Air Force. He also played in bands at Western Maryland College and the University of Maryland’s College Park, from which he graduated in the late 1960s.

After several years as an industrial arts teacher, Baker switched his full attention to music, which he taught at Aberdeen public schools until his retirement six years ago. In his early days of teaching he also had a short stint as the Aberdeen High School softball coach, and jokingly credits himself with training one of his players, Col. Ripken Jr., to be a big league manager.

The Baker family has four generations in Aberdeen. Chuck Baker is the younger brother of Rudger Baker, a former tennis pro and reporter who died in 1990.

Baker still lives in Aberdeen with Barbara, his wife of nearly 40 years. They have two children, Patricia, 32, and Neil, 29.

While teaching, Baker began moonlighting with the Chuck Demore Orchestra, a local band playing nostalgia and Aberdeen in the mid-40s. Demore retired, turning the band over to Baker.

Since then the band has grown to 16 members, and its reputation has grown as well. While playing mostly in Harford County and around Baltimore, the Chuck Baker Orchestra has also played as far south as Annapolis, as far north as Wilmington, and as far west as Harrisburg.

Baker’s orchestra is made up mostly of music teachers, businessmen, and Proving Ground employees, has weathered several personnel changes over the years. Baker, Leon Decker on trumpet and Norm Donbeck on trombone are the only surviving members from the original band. Alto saxophonist Frank Reinhart and keyboard player Marshall Feldman are 10-year veterans, while tenor sax player Randy Lolland, baritone sax player Phil Chay, trumpeter Bob Michelow, bassist Jim Bouton, and drummer Mark Leppo are more recent additions to the group.

“We all get along very well,” says Baker. “One of the reasons why we’ve stuck together is that we have a nucleus of good players who aren’t necessarily professional musicians, but who are trained and competent.”

“If we didn’t enjoy playing, we wouldn’t do it. The money hardly pays for the amount of time spent away from our families. In every case, the fellows are playing because they like to.”

The big band style, the dominant form of popular music in the 30s and 40s, was replaced by rock ’n’ roll in the 50s as the favorite dance music of America’s youth. Instead of fighting that trend, Baker’s band has adapted to it, and its repertoire now includes Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie tunes in addition to Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller.

“Top 40 and rock aren’t particularly suitable for the big band sound,” says Baker, “but we try to keep up with everything.” According to Baker, the younger people like the newer selections, “but they’re also dancing when we play the old standards, too.”

On a typical evening, Baker’s orchestra will play everything from “Stardust” or “In the Mood” to themes from “Fame.” The older numbers remain the most popular. Baker says, with classics like “Satin Doll,” “New York, New York,” and “Let Me In San Francisco,” among the most requested.

According to Baker, the band can also play Latin-American music, several waltzes and polkas, and it even has developed its own arrangement of “Elfin,” a recent country hit.

Baker is saddened by the demise of the big band sound in popular music, and laments what he calls a “lack of versatility in dance music today.”

Baker thinks that the relatively high cost of hiring a big band makes a high-band comeback unlikely.

“I don’t think it would be financially possible for big bands to make a comeback, as much as I’d like to see it,” he says. “I’m just pleased that our playing has remained as popular as it has.”

Chuck Baker Orchestra

Baker says he tries to encourage young musicians to gain experience by playing with his orchestra. “It’s good to keep some young blood in the band. We have a lot to offer to young musicians, and we can learn from them, too. It’s my hope that there will be a continual influx of new players as long as there is a demand for this kind of music.”

Since retiring from teaching 15 years ago, Baker has concentrated on his music and playing a little tennis. He says he is enjoying himself, and has no plans to retire from the band anytime soon.

“I taught a couple of instruments about 15 years ago. I’m still playing,” he says. “It’s just a question of who’s going to go first—the instruments or me.”

“I don’t consider myself to be a great musician—I’m always trying to improve my playing, and because I haven’t gotten to where I want to be, I’m still playing.”

Even so, Baker can’t deny that his musical career has come a long way. On another New Year’s Eve, many years ago when he was in college, Baker boarded a Greyhound bus in Aber-
deen for an engagement in Washington, D.C. The bus was crowded, so Baker had to sit on his saxophone in the aisle. It was snowing heavily that night, but the bus made it to Washington and back, returning to Aberdeen in the hours of the morning. For his efforts, Baker was paid $10.

“We’re just happy to be doing what we’re doing, and we’re happy that there’s a certain age group that likes our music,” he says. “When the dancers are enjoying themselves, we’re enjoying ourselves.”

Members of the 18-piece Chuck Baker Orchestra perform a number at Harford Day School Friday.
Aberdeen’s Chuck Baker plays on
His orchestra is keeping the Big Band sounds alive in Harford

By Renee Fischer

The beginnings of the Chuck Baker Orchestra were in the 1930s when Chuck Baker, then an Aberdeen High School student, picked up a trumpet and started playing big band music.

And, although his musical career has faced obstacles, Mr. Baker continues to play.

Not unlike many teen-agers who start playing in garages and dream of starting a band, Mr. Baker said a friend and classmate of his started to take trumpet lessons from a man from the Peabody Conservatory of Music, and so he decided to do as well.

He started playing in the Aberdeen High School band, and when he graduated in 1935, he played in marching and dance bands at Western Maryland College, where he was going to school.

Mr. Baker went into the service in World War II as an aviation cadet, but continued with his music and played in several cadet bands while in training.

"I would play whenever I had the opportunity, wherever I was stationed," Mr. Baker said.

After the war, Mr. Baker continued his college education at the University of Maryland, studying industrial arts.

At this time, he played in a band called "The Airmen," with other fellow aviators.

"It was sort of a play on words because we were also musical airs," Mr. Baker said with a smile.

The band played at USO dances and other local places, and Mr. Baker graduated from college in 1948.

"Then I was called back into the service in the Korean War," he said.

During the Korean War, Mr. Baker served one year in England where he flew F-84 Thunderjets, he said.

Even then, Mr. Baker formed a band "with men from various squadrons," he said.

When he returned, he began teaching industrial arts at Aberdeen High School.

Mr. Baker took courses at the Peabody Conservatory and Towson State University, became certified to teach instrumental music and became the band director at the school.

And some of his students have joined bands of his later, Mr. Baker said.

After teaching high school for 15 years, until 1987, Mr. Baker began teaching elementary school at Hills Cross Roads, Royston Williams Elementary, and Hillside Elementary.

He retired from teaching in 1975, but Mr. Baker is still playing in the Chuck Baker Orchestra.

"As long as people will listen to our music, we’ll play," Mr. Baker said.

The band’s current incarnation has two trumpets, two trombones, one saxophone, a drummer, an electric bass player and one keyboard player.

They still play old favorites like "Embraceable You" and "Star Dust," although they also added some soft rock and Latin-American tunes.

Mr. Baker no longer plays the trumpet. He plays third alto saxophone.

He had been alternating back and forth between the trumpet and the saxophone for years, ever since a friend left a saxophone with him for a week. Mr. Baker picked it up and started to teach himself to play.

Four years ago, when he had triple bypass heart surgery, Mr. Baker said a tube left near tissue in the middle of his upper lip, which doesn’t allow him to get the proper vibrations on his lips to play trumpet.

Now, he plays the saxophone exclusively, and at age 76, Mr. Baker said, "I’ll continue to play as long as I still enjoy it."

In some ways, Mr. Baker is still like an energetic young musician, networking to get gigs.

He said he is trying to get an annual dance in Aberdeen where the band can play, and he clips engagement announcements in all the local papers and sends the people information about his band.

The band recently played at Festival Park in Aberdeen and will play Sunday in Bel Air at Shanty Rock Park.

All the men and one woman in the band have other jobs.

“We didn’t, we’d starve. It’s strictly for the love of music.”
Elementary Music Class Photos
Music Class Photos
Later Years

On the Sax

Aberdeen Room Museum
AHS Class of '70 to honor Chuck Baker at reunion

On June 26 the Aberdeen High School Class of 1970 will be reuniting for their 40-year reunion at the Richlin Ballroom in Edgewood, and as part of the celebration there will be a musical tribute to former Aberdeen High teacher and local big band leader Charles W. “Chuck” Baker.

Class of 1970 or alumni of Aberdeen High School interested in attending the reunion should contact Lynn Crothers at 410-272-2106, Janis Price at 410-658-6381 or Sue Bents at suebents@gmail.com.

As part of the program, the State of Mind band will unite to honor the late Mr. Baker.

State of Mind is a 1960s retro band that returns annually to their Harford County roots to perform to assist charities raise public awareness and funding. Band members are Bruce Chapman, Jeff Fiehler, Bill Sissom, Paul Ross, Harold Baker and Howard Latham. For more information, visit: stateofmindband.com.

Mr. Baker, a native and life-long resident of Aberdeen, was educated in the local public school system before moving on to earn both a degree in music education at Towson College and study instrumental music at Baltimore’s Peabody Conservatory. He also served in the Air Force as a wartime P-51 and 86 fighter pilot.

In memory of Mr. Baker’s legacy, the Aberdeen High Class of 1970 and the State of Mind Band will be making a donation to the Aberdeen High School Instrumental Music Program in memory of Charles W. Baker. Anyone who would like to make a tax deductible contribution to this fund can send it to Aberdeen High School, 251 Paradise Road, Aberdeen, MD 21001-2399. The memo line should indicate AHS, Charles W. Baker Fund.
Aberdeen history in the making

So, what’s happening on these hot and humid days?

At the Aberdeen Room, not only are past events documented and displayed, but our display windows also show current events. Our newsletter, the “Museum Review,” also records today’s scenes of people and events. After all, today’s news is tomorrow’s history!

The Aberdeen Rotary Club is celebrating its 60th anniversary and James Lindsey has contributed a copy of the very informative booklet marking the occasion. The Rotary Club was chartered on June 28, 1950. All rotary information and history is filed at the museum.

The Chamber of Commerce has just distributed its “Aberdeen Chapter of Commerce Directory for 2010.” The chamber was chartered in 1938, and re-chartered in 1946, and has recently moved its office to South Philadelphia Boulevard. Janet Emmons brought the new directory to the Aberdeen Room; it is available for all to see, and will be a part of the file for the organization.

We saved our agenda for the Aberdeen Proving Ground Museum council meetings from May 9 and June 24, to add to the file on the planning meetings for the new Aberdeen Proving Ground Museum. The “new” museum will open in the existing Ordnance Museum building in 2012. We had the honor of speaking at the May meeting, and Mindy Rosewitz, curator of the Fort Monroe Museum, spoke in June.

The new Patient First facility opened in Aberdeen in June. We brought brochures from the opening event for display, and to place in the files of Aberdeen medical facilities.

This summer, the Aberdeen Summer Concert Series is dedicated to its founder, Charles “Chuck” Baker. The Aberdeen High School Class of 1970, at its reunion, held a tribute program and fundraiser for the AHS Band, in Chuck’s honor. Barbara and Patty Baker, and many members of the Baker family, attended the outstanding evening at which the “State of Mind” musical group played.

The Aberdeen Room Museum north window is devoted to the musical groups with which Chuck played. Barbara Baker brought the T-shirt marking the tribute to her husband, and it is part of the display.

The “1975 Directory of the Class of 1970” is also part of the class memorabilia.

Barbara Baker also contributed a souvenir key chain from Landbeck and Company Realtors and a match book from the New Ideal Diner.

Mary Clary has started another binder of the history of the Aberdeen Room itself. Binders have been maintained from 1987, when the archives and museum was founded.

James and Audrey Hawks brought in a photo of the old Viele

See Doc. Page 20