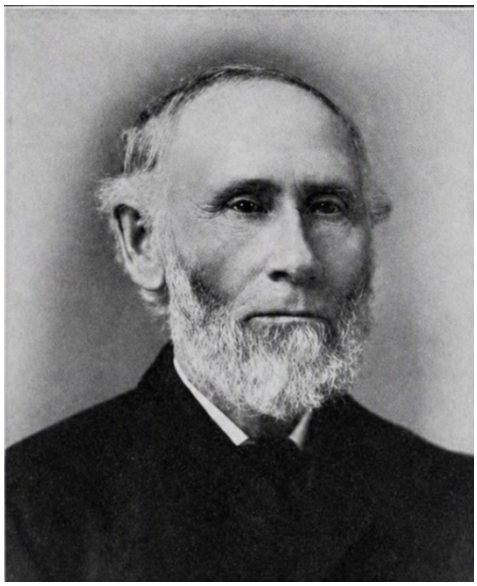


Leonard Fiske Baker
December 5, 1824 – March 19, 1912
Merchant

Overview
Leonard Fiske Baker was one of the most influential business and civic leaders in nineteenth-century Hampton, Illinois. Over a career that spanned more than half a century, he helped shape the commercial, governmental, educational, and social life of Rock Island County. Known for his honesty, reliability, and commitment to public service, Baker earned the confidence of his neighbors and was repeatedly entrusted with positions of responsibility. His life reflected the values of industry, community involvement, and public duty that characterized many of the region's early settlers.

Born on December 5, 1824, in Worcester County, Massachusetts, Baker descended from families with deep colonial roots. His father, Captain Silas Baker, and mother, Abigail Hager Baker, belonged to long-established New England families of English ancestry. Family traditions connected the Bakers to some of the earliest periods of American history, including the era of the American Revolution. These influences helped shape Baker's lifelong commitment to civic responsibility and community leadership.

Family and Career
Baker received his education in local common schools and later attended the Massachusetts Academy for approximately three years. After completing his studies, he worked as a schoolteacher before moving west to Rock Island County, Illinois. Upon arrival, he spent three years as a clerk for merchant M. W. Wright, gaining valuable commercial experience that prepared him for a successful career in business.

In 1853, Baker entered the mercantile trade in partnership with H. F. Thomas. Their general store became an important local enterprise and operated successfully until the outbreak of the Civil War, when Baker sold his interest. Following years of public service, he returned to merchandising during the 1870s. In 1880, he formed a partnership with Henry Clark and later

became sole proprietor. In 1887, he established the firm of L. F. Baker and Sons with his sons, Howard Grant Baker and Silas Sawyer Baker. The company prospered for two decades before being sold in 1907, marking Baker's retirement from active business life.

On September 7, 1851, Baker married Milla W. Sawyer. The couple raised seven children, although only three survived to adulthood: Agnes M. Baker, Howard Grant Baker, and Silas Sawyer Baker. Milla Baker died in 1887 and was buried in Hampton Cemetery. Despite personal losses, Baker remained deeply involved in church and community affairs. He was especially known for his service as a bass singer in church choirs and funeral services for more than forty years. His final public performance occurred in August 1911. A series of strokes later weakened his health, and he died on March 19, 1912, while staying with family in Chicago.

Political Contributions

Baker devoted a significant portion of his life to public service. Although he began his political involvement as a member of the Whig Party, he later became affiliated with the Republican Party. His political reputation was built not on partisan conflict but on fairness, practical judgment, and dedication to the welfare of his community.

In 1852, he was elected justice of the peace, beginning what became roughly thirty years of continuous service through repeated re-election. His long tenure demonstrated the confidence local residents placed in his integrity and legal judgment. Baker also served a term as county supervisor beginning in 1865 and held a variety of additional public offices, including postmaster of Hampton for nearly seventeen years, notary public, and school director.

Beyond the offices he held, Baker contributed to the development of stable local government during a period of rapid growth in Rock Island County. He was widely respected as an able official whose decisions were guided by honesty and a concern for the common good. His influence extended from local courts and public administration to education and community improvement projects.

Military Record

There is no evidence that Leonard Fiske Baker served in the military. Although he lived during the era of the Civil War and sold his business interest around the beginning of that conflict, available biographical information contains no record of military enlistment or active military service.

Instead, Baker's most significant contributions during his lifetime were made through commerce, local government, education, and civic leadership. His legacy rests not on military achievements but on decades of faithful service to the people of Hampton and Rock Island County. Through his business success, public offices, church involvement, and community leadership, Leonard Fiske Baker left a lasting mark on the development of eastern Illinois and earned a reputation as one of Hampton's most respected citizens.

Bibliography

Co., S. J. (1897). *The Biographical Record of Rock Island County Illinois.* Rock Island: S. J. Clarke Publishing.

Plat Map of Rock Island County (1905), Rock Island County Museum Archives