

Biography of George Frederick Baer

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SUPPLEMENT I.

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BAER, George Frederick, railroad president, was born at Somerset, Pa., Sept. 26, 1842, son of Major Solomon and Anna Maria (Baker) Baer. His earliest American ancestor was Christophel Baer, who came to this country from the duchy of Zweibrucken, Germany, prior to 1740, and settled in Northampton county, Pa., in 1743. His son, John Jacob, who was George F. Baer's grandfather, moved to Allegheny county, Md., in 1800, whence Solomon Baer (1794-1882) went to Somerset county, Pa., and engaged in farming. The son received his early education in the Somerset Institute and Somerset Academy. At the age of thirteen years he entered the office of the Somerset "Democrat" and worked at the printing trade for over two years. Subsequently he entered Franklin and Marshall College, but his studies were interrupted by the outbreak of the civil war in 1861, and shortly after he and his brother Henry became owners of the "Democrat." In the absence of the latter, who entered the army, much extra labor devolved upon George; he worked at the printer's case all day and edited the paper and studied law at night. In August, 1862, he raised a company for the 133d regiment of Pennsylvania volunteers, of which he was elected captain, and proceeding to the front served in Humphreys' division of the army of the Potomac. Joining the army at the second battle of Bull Run, he participated in all the engagements up to and including that at Chancellorsville, when he was detailed as the adjutant-general of the second brigade. After the war Mr. Baer resumed his legal studies in another brother's office, and was admitted to the bar in 1864. Four years later he removed to Reading, Pa., and rapidly gained prominence at the Berks county bar, where for many years he was an active practitioner, and took a prominent part in the upbuilding of the community. His connection with the Reading companies dates from 1870, when he prosecuted an action for damages against the road so ably and successfully that he was at once made counsel for the Philadelphia & Reading railroad. As his law practice increased he was enabled to extend the field of his operations, and so successfully did he embrace the opportunities offered to him, that he became president of a large number of the state's best-known manufacturers' industries, and a director in a number of others. He had been the confidential legal adviser of Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan for ??? time, and he rendered a valuable service to the latter by securing an entrance for one of his railroads into Pittsburg, Pa., and cooperating with the financier in his plan to unite under one management all the coal-carrying roads with terminals in New York city. When the work of reorganization took place in 1901, Mr. Baer was elected president of the Reading Co., the Philadelphia & Reading Railway Co., the Philadelphia & Reading Coal and Iron Co., and the Central Railroad Co. of New Jersey. The Reading Co., which is a holding company, acts under a special charter in the state of Pennsylvania. It owns the stock and bonds of the Philadelphia and Reading Railway Co., and the stock of the Philadelphia & Reading Coal and Iron Co., and the Reading Iron Co., as well as the stock of all the smaller roads comprising the Reading system, and a majority of the stock of the Central Railroad Co. of New Jersey. The Philadelphia and Reading Railway Co. is the operating company, operating all the branch lines through lease or agreement, with the exception of the Central Railroad Co. of New Jersey and one or two others. The Philadelphia & Reading Coal and Iron Co. controls and operates all the coal properties of the system with the exception of those controlled by the Central Railroad Co. of New Jersey. Meanwhile Mr. Morgan and his interests acquired a controlling interest in the Philadelphia & Reading railroad. When the great anthracite coal strike began on May 12, 1902, it soon became known that the combination of the anthracite coal-producing and transportation companies under one management gave the mine owners and operators a formidable advantage. There were 147,000 miners thrown out of employment and invested capital amounting to more than \$500,000,000 became idle. A fight between mine guards and strikers took place on June 5th at Wilkes-Barre and shortly afterward an attempt was made on the life of T. A. Thomas, division superintendent of the Lehigh Coal Company at Wilkes-Barre. There were also riots and acts of violence at other places. In this emergency Pres. Baer was a firm champion of the mine owners and operators, although his position was not primarily one of hostility to the demands of the mine-workers, but rather to the claims of the United Mine Workers of America, the organization which controlled them, and which instigated the strike. During the course of the strike, which lasted from May 12th to October 23d, Mr. Baer was recognized as the most important person on the side of the mine owners. Senators Quay and Penrose of Pennsylvania had a conference with him in the second week in July; and as Mr. Morgan, to whom many looked for help in bringing the opposing interests together, refused to be drawn into the controversy, the responsibility put upon Pres. Baer became still more weighty and acute. But he did not flinch from the attitude taken by him at first. Meanwhile no hard coal had been delivered that summer, the available supply had long since become exhausted and cold weather

was approaching. At a meeting of the leading men of the-coal trust held in his office September 16th, a statement was given out that the operators would not yield and throughout all succeeding conferences and attempts at reconciliation this attitude was maintained. At this stage Près. Roosevelt stepped in to help solve the difficulty. On October 3d he called together in conference the coal operators and Près. Mitchell of the United Mine Workers, and on October 14th, announced that the mine owners were willing to arbitrate the points in dispute, but stipulated from what ranks the arbitrators should be selected. The outcome was the appointment of a commission to investigate both sides of the question and the men returned to the mines. In April, 1903, he was called as a witness in the hearing of charges against the anthracite coal roads oefore the Interstate Commerce Commission, on the charge of the complaint of William R. Hearst of the New York "American" that his railroads had combined to restrict the output of anthracite coal and to divide the transportation trade in the interest of the mines controlled by the railroads and against the independent operators, in violation of a section of the Pennsylvania constitution of 1874, which says that no railroad company shall engage in coal mining or other enterprise by which commodities are produced, and that no coal mining corporation shall operate a railroad more than fifty miles in length. Mr. Baer in defense asserted that that particular section of the constitution had no application whatever to the Philadelphia & Reading Coal and Iron Co., or to the Reading Co., these being distinct and separate corporations; he invited the commission to proceed under the Sherman anti-trust law, and promised that if anything his companies had done was contrary to the law of the land they would abide by the decision of the proper tribunal. As a railway executive Pres. Baer has thorough control of the details of organization and administration, and is considerate of the interests of his employés. He has been alert to discern when improvements were needed in the personnel and plant of his roads, and has been prompt to supply them. Self-made, his own experience has enabled him to apply the tests of honesty and ability in the promotion of his subordinates, and in May, 1906, when public attention was specially directed to the fraudulent management of great railways and other corporations, he publicly claimed that criticism did not and could not be brought against the management of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad Company. He is a regular attendant of the Reformed church. He is a great reader and close, practical student of the Bible, whose language he frequently quotes in conversation and m public addresses. His record proves him to be absolutely fearless of public opinion when he believes he is right, and his administration of the great interests over which he presides has been eminently successful. Mr. Baer received the honorary degrees of A.M. in 1872, and LL.D. in 1888, from the Franklin and Marshall College. He was married June 14, 1866, to Emily, daughter of John Kimmel, and has five daughters.

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