

CANNING BUILDINGS

During the Civil War, Baltimore was a central hub of the canning industry, as it quickly responded to increased demand for preserved foods driven by wartime needs. Innovations in canning technology allowed for the preservation of fresh meats, fruits, and select vegetables, revolutionizing military rations beyond salted pork and pickled beef and giving the local citizen food options beyond home preservation.

George Washington Baker was a pioneer in Aberdeen's canning history, first canning fruits and later developing a method of preserving sweet shoepeg corn in a can without it turning black. As the first person to begin canning in Harford County back in 1867, George Washington Baker helped solidify Aberdeen's status as the region's canning epicenter.

His 5 sons followed in his footsteps as canners, each building their own canning empire. In 1908, Charles W. Baker, son of George W. Baker, built this canning warehouse, expanding the family's enterprise and bolstering Aberdeen's role in the canning industry.

The Baker factory churned out an impressive 125,000 cases of corn per season. This not only fueled local commerce but also contributed to the growth of Aberdeen. The warehouse was connected to the railway by a short spur line that crossed Bel Air Avenue and ran along the right side of the warehouse. There, cans were loaded up onto trains for shipment.



An early Baker can of Baker sugar corn, circa 1875.

The can has a center hole in the top through which the can was filled. A small lid was then soldered on with lead solder.

Because the can opener was not invented until 1858, people were left up to their own devices to get into the cans, employing everything from knives to screwdrivers to bayonets to rocks.

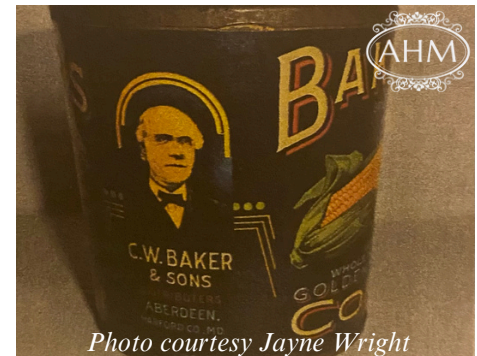
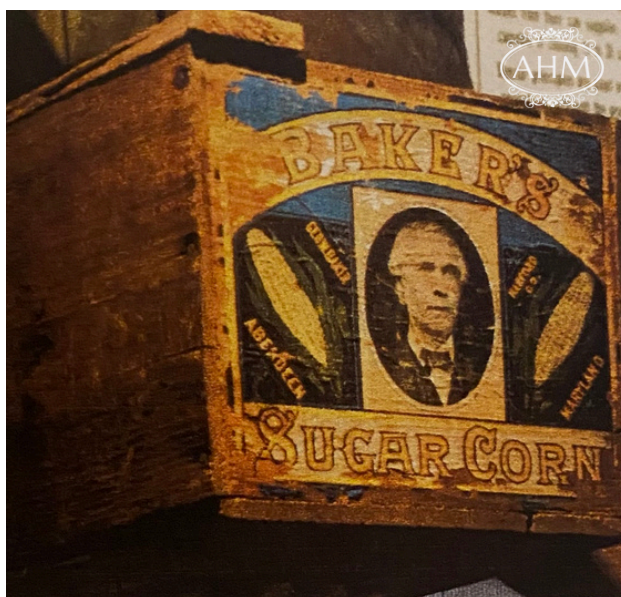


Photo courtesy Jayne Wright



Another of the various ornate can labels used for corn distributed by C.W Baker

Photo courtesy Jayne Wright

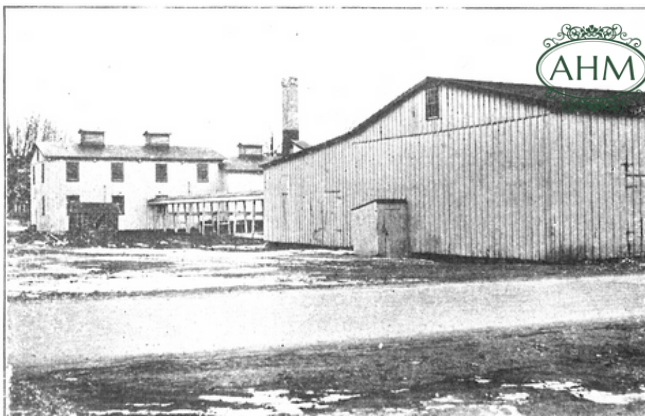


Wood packing crate featuring a George W. Baker identifying label with rare color.

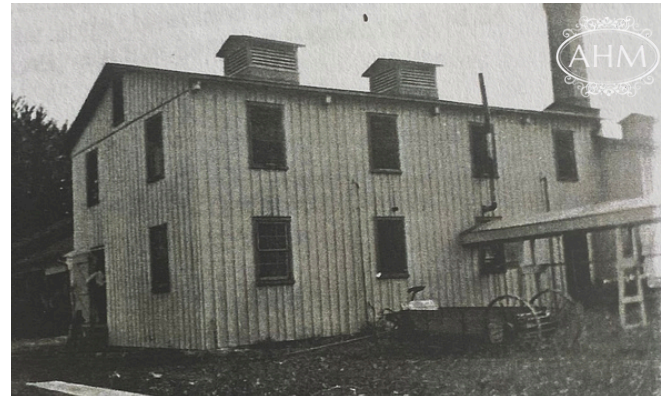
Photos taken by AHM staff at Stepping Stone Museum Canning House, Havre de Grace, Maryland



West Bel Air Avenue in 1908. On the right is the Baker Canning Warehouse (*today: 413 W. Bel Air Avenue*). Running parallel to the side of the building is the railroad spur line. In the distance on the left and right are homes of 4 of the 5 canning Baker Brothers. (The 5th brother built his home in Havre de Grace, which later became the first hospital in Harford County.)



The building in the background is the cannery, connected by a covered walkway that bridged a stream on its way to the warehouse in the foreground.

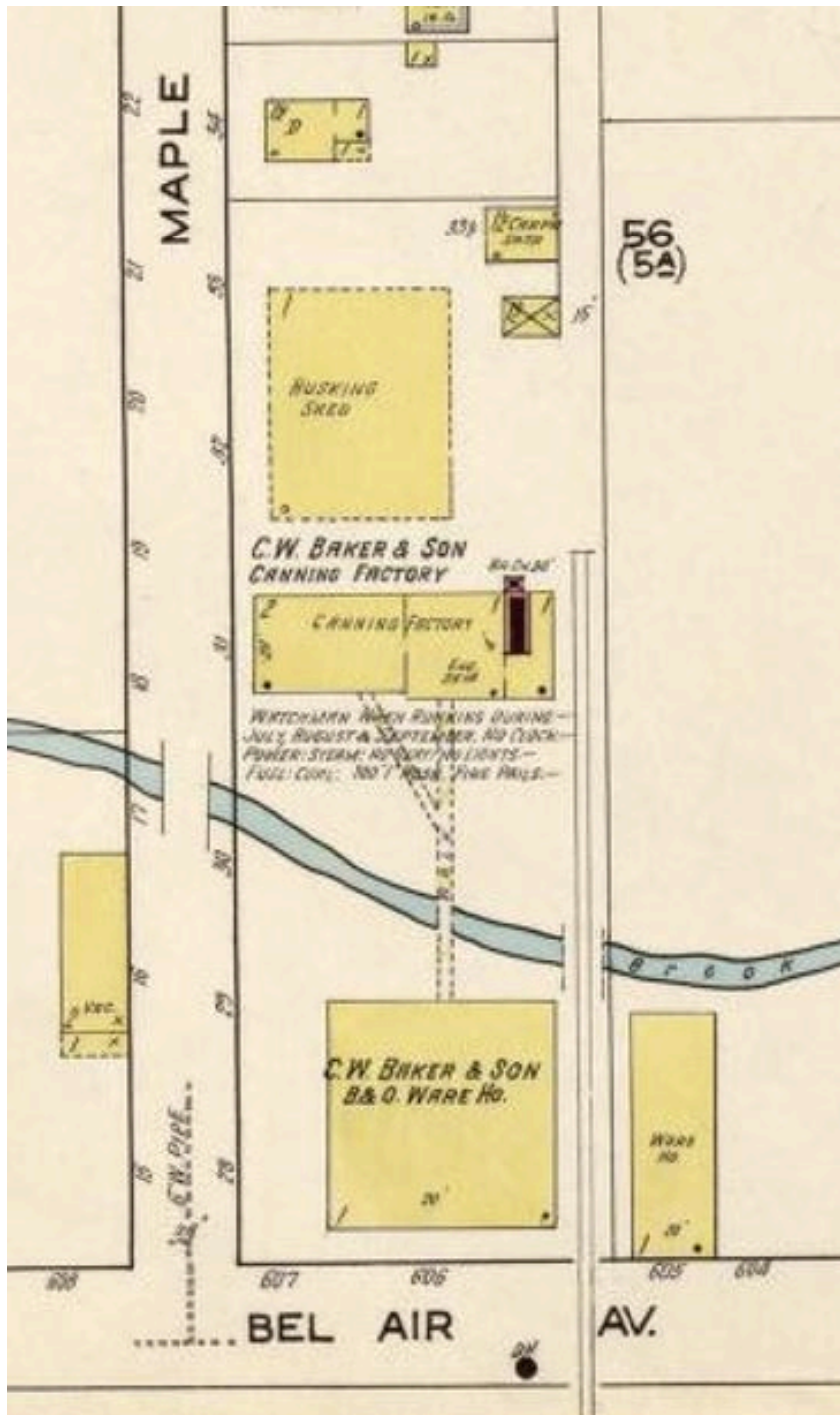


Cannery in 1921.

In the foreground is a portion of the canning warehouse, circa 1965. The original chimney of cannery behind it may still be seen today.

Because canning was seasonal, the open-air buildings were far from luxurious. They were built for functionality, without heat, running water or electricity. Water was sourced from the stream that flowed through the property.





This 1916 Sanborn Insurance Map shows the C.W. Baker & Son cannery factory and 2 warehouses, along with the husking shed, a smaller shed, a stable (marked with an "X"), and the covered walkway between the 2 main buildings. The railroad spur-line that crosses Bel Air Avenue runs between the warehouses.

The text beneath the cannery factory states, "Watchman when running during -- July, August, September. No clock -- Power: Steam. No heat, no lights -- Fuel: Coal; 100 ft. Hose; Fire pails" This tell us that if there was a fire, a bucket brigade would line up from the brook and pass buckets of water from hand-to-hand to help extinguish the fire.

Note that before Baker Street was renamed, it was called Maple Avenue.