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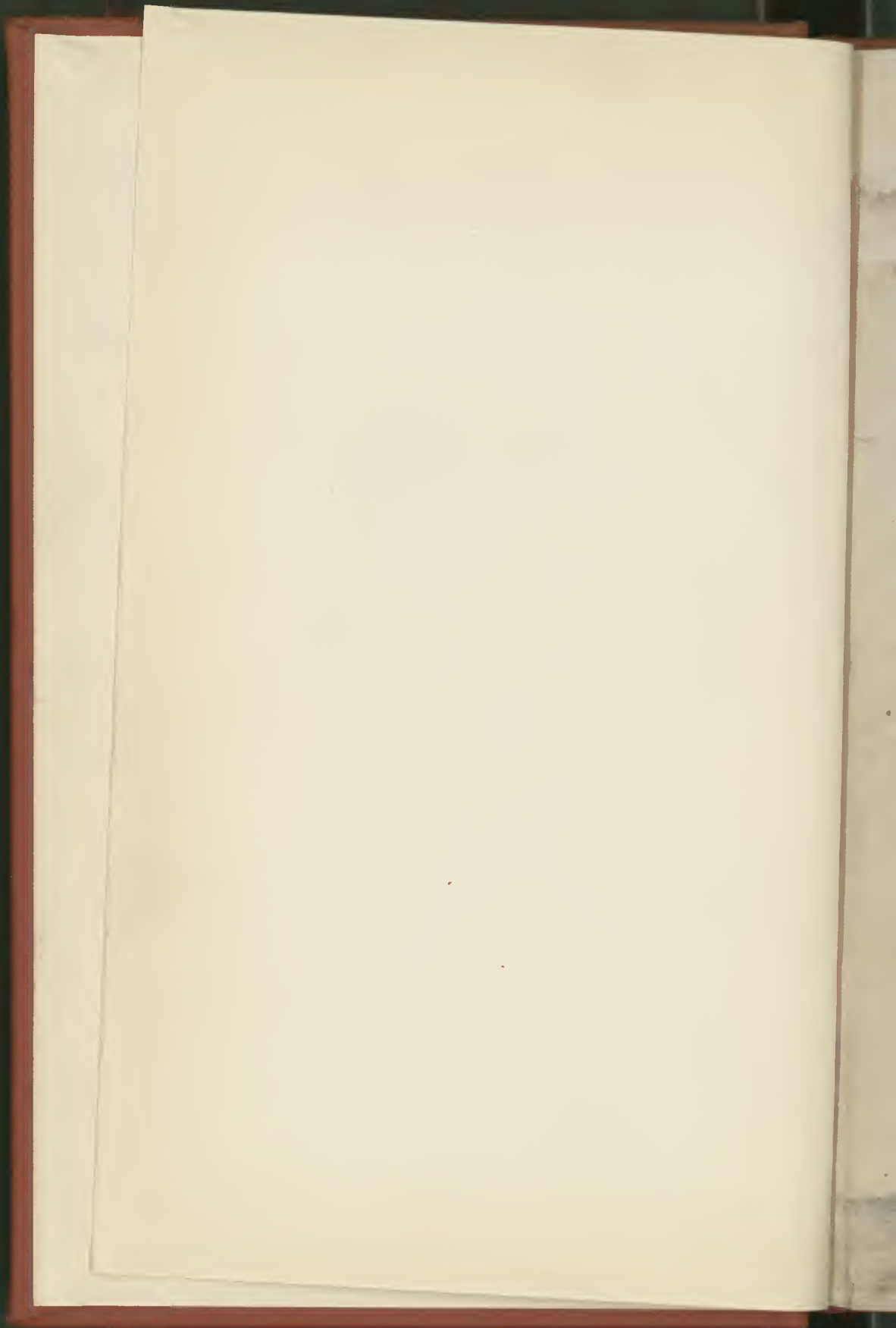
Baker



Class Law

Book \_\_\_\_\_





THE  
CONFESSION

OF

JOSEPH BAKER,

A CANADIAN BY BIRTH,

WHO, FOR

MURDER & PIRACY

COMMITTED ON THE HIGH SEAS,  
ON BOARD THE

*Schooner Eliza,*

CAPTAIN W<sup>M</sup>. WHELAND,

IN A VOYAGE FROM PHILADELPHIA  
BOUND TO ST. THOMAS'S.

WHO WAS TRIED ON THE 25<sup>th</sup> OF APRIL, 1800, BEFORE  
THE HON. SAMUEL CHASE AND RICHARD PETERS,  
JUDGES OF THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE  
UNITED STATES, FOR THE DISTRICT  
OF PENNSYLVANIA,

*And now under sentence of Death, in the solitary  
cells of the Penitentiary House of the  
City and County of Philadelphia.*

---

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*Joseph Baker*

Law

THE CONFESSION  
OF  
**JOSEPH BAKER,**  
(CANADIAN BY BIRTH.)

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Considering the awfulness of my situation, the dreadful tribunal before which I must appear, there to give an account to a jealous and much-offended (but just and merciful God) of all my vile and wicked crimes, committed at this early time of life, I deem it a duty I owe to captain Wheland, and to the community in general, to give a clear and circumstantial account of the horrid act, and of all the circumstances leading thereto, so that such of my fellow-men as follow the seas, might take warning at my fate, and learn to fear God; to shun such wicked practices, and thereby avoid those disagreeable feelings which I have and am now suffering, and the ignominious and untimely end to which I must shortly be brought.

I was born in the year 1779, at Les-trois-riviers, in Canada, in a street called Forge-street. I was eighteen years old when I left my father, and went to Lake Champlain, from there I went to Virginia, on Lake Champlain, being sixty miles from the line of Canada: In June, 1799, I worked my passage in a boat from thence to Albany and New-York, where I went to work in company with another Canadian, at making staves, and continued in that employment 8 days, at two dollars per day; to the other man, with whom I worked, I lent money to pay for his lodging, and gave the remainder of my money and clothes in

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my charge, with all which he was told I then  
went to the country to one colonel Knolls, about  
ry one mile from New-York, and got from him  
a recommendation to obtain work at the highest  
penter's bunneis. On my return to New-York,  
there I became acquainted with one Pierre Lewis  
Lacrouse, (who is now under the unhappy sentence  
with myself, for the same crime.) One evening I  
went to a tavern in company with Lacrouse; and,  
in conversation, he asked me where I lodged? I  
told him where my lodgings were, and the next  
day he (in company with Beruse, now under the  
same sentence also) called upon me: they told me  
I was a fool to stay in such a country as this was,  
when if I would go the West-Indies and work at  
my trade, I could get five dollars per day. They  
told me of an English vessel at New-York, mount-  
ing eighteen guns, which was bound to Jamaica;  
with a cargo of flour and lumber. I went and  
entered on board of this vessel as ship-carpenter.  
There were seven Italians and Frenchmen on  
board this vessel, who proposed to me to enter into  
a secret conspiracy for surprizing the captain and  
crew on her voyage to the West-Indies, and make  
ourselves masters of the ship and cargo: But I  
would not agree to their proposal, and, therefore,  
quitted the ship; in consequence of which, Pierre  
Lewis Lacrouse and Joseph Beruse, quitted her  
also. I came to Philadelphia on the twentieth  
of August, 1799, and took up lodgings at a board-  
ing house in Water-street, in company with Pierre  
Lewis Lacrouse: The before-mentioned Beruse,  
having found out where we lodged, came and  
took lodgings in the same house. As I did not  
like the company of Beruse, I told Pierre Lewis  
Lacrouse, to let us go, and look out for a vessel  
that was going to the West-Indies, and quit  
Beruse. We found one captain Wheland who was  
bound to St. Thomas. I enquired of him if he  
wanted any hands: he told me he wanted two,

and shipped Lacrouse and myself at twenty-five dollars per month, Lacrouse and myself then went to another part of the city to lodge, till the vessel should be ready to sail; but, unfortunately, we meet with Beruse in the street, and he asked me to lend him three dollars, for the purpose of paying his board. I accordingly lent it to him, and told him I never wanted to see him any more. The next Monday morning Lacrouse and myself went on board the vessel to stay; and, to our great surprize, we saw Beruse on board at work. I then asked him if he was shipped with the vessel? he told me he was to work his passage. We told him that this was not the way to go to the Havannah, as he said he meant to do. He told me he would find some vessel at St. Kitts that would be going to the Havannah. After which, the captain took him to the merchant to sign articles to work his passage. The merchant asked him what countryman he was: he told him he was an Italian. The merchant told him it was not true, for he was a Frenchman, and he had no passage for him. Afterwards the captain told him to go on board to work, and he would pay him for what he did: the captain that afternoon told him he would give him his passage, although the merchant had refused it. He accordingly went on board the vessel, and we sailed from Philadelphia, bound to St. Thomas, on the 27th August, 1799. The 4th September following, being at sea, Beruse asked me if I would assist him in taking the vessel. I told him I would not. After which, he put the same question to Lacrouse. He also told him he would have nothing to do with it; but he continually harrassed us for three days to consent to his wicked proposal: Lacrouse then told him, that if he would take the vessel, he (Lacrouse) would take her into port. He then asked me to take some poison out of the medicine-chest, and put some in the soup, for the purpose of destroying the captain, and the three other



men. I told him that I had not so hard an heart as to kill any man. I then asked him if he had a heart hard enough to kill a man? yes, says he, and if I had fifty of them tied hand and foot, I could kill them all, and my father at the head of them too. I told him that my heart was not so hard as all that come to. Brous then told me that he was an officer in the service of the French Republic; and said, that if I did not consent to assist in taking the vessel, that the first French cruiser they came up with, he would report me thereto, and have me shot. I told him I was not a Frenchman, but was a Canadian. He told me that he would report me to be a Frenchman, and not a Canadian, and that general de Forneaux would take his word before he would mine. I told him that I would see that, and he said it was very well. I was in hopes every day that some American or English vessel would come in sight, as I intended to have reported to captain Wheland what Brous had said; but, unfortunately for us, we met with none. About two days after Brous and I had had the foregoing conversation, Brous again asked me (at about 10 o'clock at night) if I was ready to help him to take the vessel? I told him I would have nothing to do with it. He then replied, "I will begin, and you must take care of yourself," and called me a coward. Next night, about ten o'clock, he called me to light a candle. I, accordingly, was about doing so, when the mate asked me where I was going: I told him I was about lighting a candle for the binnacle, and when I brought up the candle, I found the mate lying dead on the companion. Brous had an axe in his hand, and Lacroix had a handspike in his, standing side by side. They told me to go down and take the captain's sword, and if he was a-sleep, to run it through his body, and if I did not do it, they would kill me: I went down, but I could not find it in my heart to kill the captain, but struck him on the hand with a hatchet:

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He then jumped up, and made a dash at me, and I then struck him on the head. Immediately I ran up on deck: Brous then attempted to kill me, because I had not killed the captain: I told him I had not the heart to kill him.

Lacroix stood on the companion, with a handspike in his hand, to kill the first man that came up. The supercargo came up, with a pistol in each hand, and Lacroix knocked him down with the handspike: Lacroix then told me to lower the peak of the chain-fail; but, just as I was going to do it, I observed the supercargo coming after me, with a pistol in each hand, to kill me. I then looked behind me, and saw a stick, which I picked up and struck him with, and knocked him down. All this time the captain was below, and called out to Lacroix. I asked what he wanted; he told me to save his life. Brous told the captain to come up; the captain said, "you will kill me if I do." I told him to stay down, and surrender himself a prisoner of war. The captain then said he would. Lacroix then went down to bring up some liquor, and called me down to help to bring up the supercargo on deck. Brous and myself went down and brought him up. We then laid him down till Lacroix brought some liquor to wash his wounds, but Brous said he would give him liquor enough; and immediately threw him overboard, though he was yet living. Brous told us to come along with him and kill the sailor in the fore-castle: I told him I would not. Brous bid me go down to the sailor. I accordingly did so: the sailor asked me if I wanted to kill him? I told him, that I did not, but that Brous did. He asked me where Brous was: I told him he was on deck, laying in wait to kill him: he then jumped on deck to catch Brous, but, before he could get to him, Brous struck him with a handspike, and killed him. He then threw him overboard. We had now killed all but the captain, who considered himself as a prisoner of war. About four days after,

Lacroix found a bottle of quinine in the treasur-  
chest; he told me to take care of it. I took it and  
used it; Brous came to me after words, and asked me  
where the bottle was? he said he would give  
some to the captain to drink, so as it might kill him:  
I told him I had lost it; but, a little time after, he  
found another bottle of the same kind, which he  
said he would keep himself, and give it to the cap-  
tain to drink, as soon as we saw a vessel heave  
in sight; so that he might say that all hands had died  
on board except us three. I told the captain of his  
danger, that Brous was determined to kill him the  
very first vessel we saw. The captain said he could  
not help it; but he would do the best he could to  
save himself.

The next day the captain told me he was sick, and  
desired me to go and get some ham for him: La-  
croix and myself went down to get some for him,  
and when we went down, the captain took the axe  
and knocked Brous down. He then immediately  
locked down the forecastle, so that we could not  
get up. Lacroix told me to assist him below, in cut-  
ting the mast down, so that it might fall, and tear  
up the deck, that we might get out: I told him that  
I did not want to do so, and, in consequence of my  
refusal, he abused me very much, and said I was a  
coward. We were fourteen days in the hold before  
we got to St. Bartholomews, and, during that time,  
we lived upon flour and water, and some liquor.  
After we arrived at St. Bartholomews, the captain  
put us on board an American armed vessel, the lieu-  
tenant of which abused us in a violent manner, and  
put ropes round our necks: we remained in this  
situation three days, and then we were taken to St.  
Kitts, where we were put in prison and kept in irons,  
on five ounces of bread and water per day for nine-  
teen days. We were then put on board the United  
States sloop of war Ganges, and were in irons eigh-  
teen days, sleeping on deck all the while. Brous  
and Lacroix told me to declare myself a French-

man, at the peril of my life. They also told me, if I would consent to this declaration, each of them would give me 700 dollars, to which I consented. We arrived at Philadelphia on the 15th of November, 1799, and were landed from on board the Ganges, conducted to prison under guard, and immediately lodged in the cells. 'Tis but justice I owe to the inspectors, and to every keeper about the prison, to say, that we have always been treated with every degree of humanity, and, in every respect, as well as the nature of our situations could admit of, received full allowance, nor were we ever put in irons until after we received the fatal (tho' just) condemnation of death, (and that by order of the court.)

And now, having finished my narration, and the time approaching fast when I must suffer the just reward due to the horrid crime in which I have been too great a participator, there remains nothing more for me to add, but to declare that I die in the full belief of the Roman Catholic religion; that I have truly and sincerely repented of my manifold sins and transgressions, and, as I place a firm reliance on the mercies of Almighty God, I humbly beseech him to manifest his blessed declaration upon me, and be to me "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, delaying indignation, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; that it may please him to number me amongst those thousands for whom he has declared he will keep mercy; and that, through the blood and merits of my blessed redeemer, my sins may be purged away, and my soul admitted into the mansions of eternal bliss. AMEN.

JOSEPH BAKER.

*Solitary cells of the Prison of the City and County  
of Philadelphia, May 8th, 1800.*

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