

# Johannes Becker



Johannes Becker



Elisabeth Friedrichs Becker

Johannes Becker was born in Oberlein (or Coberlein), West Phalia, Prussia, Germany on 22 May, 1824. He was the son of Nicholas and Magdalena Becker. It appears that he may have had three brothers, Antony, Frederic, and Theodor Becker. The relationship of these three men who lived very close by Johannes and who attended the same church and were almost the same age has not yet been proven. Johannes came to America around 1850. Johannes told the U.S. Census taker in 1900 when he was 76 years old that he came over to America in 1854, but we know in fact that he came sooner as there are real estate transactions made by him between 1850 and 1856 in which he was building up the land on which to build his cooper shop on Gratiot Avenue in what is now Detroit, but in 1855 was Hamtramck.

Johannes Becker married Elizabeth Friedrichs on 21 May, 1855 in St. Mary's Church in Detroit, Michigan. They both gave their residences as being Mackinaw. This is not the Mackinac at the tip of the mitt, but rather the small township of Mackinaw that existed on the near west side of Detroit in the 1850's.

Johannes & Elizabeth Friedrichs Becker had 5 children, Sophia Becker born 25 February, 1856, Nicholas John Becker, born in 1858, John H. Becker, born May,

1865, and Mary E. Becker and Elizabeth Becker, Sophia Becker married Wilhelm Ott and had three children, Elizabeth Ott Bender, Anne. K. Ott, and Agnes Ott Koch McDermitt, Sophia died on the 1st of March, 1926. Nicholas John Becker had married, had several children, and passed away on the 29th of January, 1897 at the age of 39 years. Nicholas had strep throat, and because there were no antibiotics in 1897, the strep throat turned into rheumatic fever. His heart valves were badly damaged by the rheumatic fever, and he succumbed to heart failure at 39 years of age. John H. Becker married Mary Haldorfer and they had 4 children, Richard S. Becker, Estella Becker, Rhea S. Becker, and Adelaide Becker. John H. Becker passed away on the 1st of December, 1941 and is buried next to his father, Johannes Becker I. Mary E. Becker married Pomeroy, and they had a number of children, Mary remarried after Mr. Pomeroy died to a Charles Cavanaugh. Elizabeth Becker married Otto Booms and had Elizabeth, John, Mary and Harold. Elizabeth died relatively early in childbirth, and Johannes and Elizabeth Becker welcomed her husband Otto, and her children into their home, and Johannes and Elizabeth raised Elizabeth's children.

Johannes Becker was an ambitious man, and soon after he married Elizabeth Friedrichs, he set about building his cooper shop in Detroit, on Gratiot Avenue on the land that is now the beginning of the I-75 expressway. Not even the land that his shop rested on exists, as it was excavated to create the I-75 X-way. on the 26th of March, 1850 Johannes Becker purchased from Joseph Crones, John A. and Mary Ann Damm of Detroit, lot 5, subdivision of the rear part of the Louis Moran farm in Detroit, reserving right of way described in volume 35, pages 484—484. The witnesses to this transaction were Joseph Keusch and Henry Campau. This was recorded on the 17th of September, 1851 in volume 42, page 676. Johannes Becker's second land purchase occurred in January, 1855. August Keratz and Johannes Becker, of Detroit, received from Peter Ebertz and wife Margretha of Detroit, on the 4th of January, 1855 quit claim to lot 29 of F.J.B. Crane's subdivision of out lot 16, Witherall farm, north of Gratiot Avenue, in Hamtramck, The witnesses to this transaction were Joseph Kuhn and Julius Stoll. The registrar at the time was H.R. Nowland. This transaction was received on the 4th of January, 1856, and was recorded in volume 62, page 127.

Johannes' next land acquisition was in 1856 when August Keratz and Johannes Becker of Detroit, received from Elizabeth Becker of Wayne county on the 4th of January, 1856, a quit claim to lot 29 of F.B. Crane's subdivision of out lot 16, Witherall farm, north of Fort Gratiot Rd, in Hamtramck. The witnesses to this transaction were G.M. Rich and George Miller. The registrar was still H.R. Nowland. The transaction was received on the 4th of January, 1856, and was recorded in volume 82, page 129.

In 1859 Johannes Becker of Detroit, purchased from Xavier Hildebrand of St. Joseph, Berrien County, on the 24th of August, 1859, the east of lot 25, S.B. Morse's subdivision of lot 3, Mullett Farm, north of Gratiot Road, in Detroit. The witnesses to this transaction were Julius Stoll and Johann Stair. The registrar was H.S. Roberts. The transaction was received on the 26th of August, 1859, and was recorded on volume 79, page 319.

Johannes Becker's next purchase was in 1861 when he purchased from George Gruber and his wife Elizabeth of Detroit, on the 10th. of December, 1861, the west 10 feet of lot 24, S.B. Morse's subdivision of lot 3 on Mullett farm, north of Gratiot St. The witnesses to this transaction were S.B. Morse and Julius Stoll, The registrar was Henry Whittlesey. This transaction was received on the 12th of December, 1861 and was recorded in volume 90, page 217.

Johannes' last purchase was in 1864 when he purchased from Louis Graulich and his wife Barbara of Detroit, on the 10th of March, 1864 the west one half of lot 3, Mullett Farm, north of Gratiot St. in Detroit. The witnesses to this transaction were Julius Stoll and Richard Koellear, The registrar was E.N. Lacroix. The transaction was received on the 10th of March, 1864, and was recorded on volume 102, page 302.

Johannes Becker was also the receiver of an inheritance from Germany, but it is not clear from the document just what Johannes' relationship was to that of the people mentioned in the document. In volume 21, page 10 of the probate court

records it states, “John Becker of Detroit, was granted power of attorney for Henry Becker I and wife Margretha, of Grunberg, Germany, on the 18th of October, 1855 re: to receive and take possession of the inheritance of John Becker, son, deceased”. The witnesses to this document was Weicher, Judge for the district of Grunberg, Germany.

Johannes Becker lived in much more uncertain times than we do today, and he certainly suffered through some very anxious moments. For instance, while Johannes Becker was purchasing land to construct his cooper shop in 1854, a pestilence visited Detroit, and the papers in Detroit made daily appeals to the citizens of Detroit to sprinkle lime in an effort to reduce the severity and incidence of pestilence. Cholera made its appearance in the latter part of May, 1854. In June, the deaths from the pestilence averaged 2 or 3 per day. In July, the number of deaths from all causes was 259, with the majority of these deaths being caused by cholera. During the month of August, 1854, the scourge finally disappeared. The death toll was very high when you consider that the Detroit of 1854 did not extend beyond what is now downtown Detroit.

In 1861 the Civil War erupted. Men in Detroit were very patriotic and were solidly behind the Union Army. Frequent rallies were held in Detroit, and all the men attended. The men formed a drill team and drilled every Monday and Wednesday on the City green. Johannes Becker was one of these men who drilled, and then out of a sense of obligation to his country, he joined the service in 1862. Johannes Becker fought many battles of the Civil War, including the Battle of Gettysburg, where he was seriously injured and was forced to join the wounded corps until the end of the war. Johannes Becker’s service record reads as follows: John Becker, of Detroit, enlisted in company G, 5th Infantry, as Sergeant on 21st of August, 1862, at Detroit for 3 years, at age 43. He was mustered in on 14th of September, 1862. He was wounded in action at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on July 2, 1863. He was transferred to the Invalid Corps on the 15th of January, 1864. Johannes was discharged at Columbus, Ohio, on the 1st of July, 1865.

The following is a first hand account from General DeTrobriand, commanding brigade, of the battle on July 2, 1863 in which Johannes Becker was injured: The

battle was then raging on my left, right, and to the rear, on both sides, in consequence of my advanced position, as already explained, and soon the two attacks came converging on the angle of which I formed the summit, with the 5th Michigan infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Pulford commanding. Fortunately, my position was then the strong one, in a wood commanding a narrow ravine, which the enemy attempted in vain to cross under our fire. The unflinching bravery of the 5th Michigan which sustained a loss of more than of its numbers without yielding a foot of ground, deserves to be especially mentioned here with due commendation.

There were light moments in the 5th Infantry as well, which no doubt, Johannes shared in its mirth as well as its agony. One of the favorite stories of the 5th Infantry is the following: During the terrible days of fighting and hardship in the Wilderness, and frequently afterwards on the Grant's flank movement to the James, the ambulance corps being unable to take care of all the wounded, mule teams with common army wagons were often ordered to the front to assist with conveying the disabled to the rear. Captain Blackman, quartermaster of the 5th Michigan, had an Irishman as a teamster, in his train, who was somewhat inclined to avoid this kind of duty. One morning, in anticipation of a hard fight, Blackman had an order to send two wagons to the front, and detailed this man with another for that purpose. The fighting having become brisk, the Irishman tried to avoid detail, stating that his mules were all lame, and he did not feel very well himself, but finally he had to go. He was absent the entire day, returning to the rear about 10 o'clock that evening. Blackman said to him on his return: "Well, Mike, how did you get along?" "Purty well, sir only they kept me fooling about, dodging balls all day, without doing a half penny's worth, until I almost despaired of getting anything to put in my wagon; but as luck would have it, be the hoky, about sundown the rebels went to work in dead earnest, and shot me down a load in about 15 minutes, seeming perfectly elated, and feeling big over his success.

Johannes Becker returned to his cooper shop in July, 1865 and remained a cooper until a few years before his death in 1905. Johannes Becker built barrels and casks in his cooper shop from 1856 until around 1900. Only one year did Johannes try his hand at plumbing, then returned to being a cooper for the rest of his days.

Johannes' father, Nicholas was also a cooper and he worked in Johannes' cooper shop until his death around 1881. Johannes' son Nicholas was also a cooper and worked in Johannes' cooper shop until his death on 2 February, 1897. Johannes was crushed at his son's death and did not work his cooper shop for close to a year after Nicholas' death.

The Becker's were strong Catholics. Johannes and Elizabeth attended St. Mary's Church for years, and later went to St. Joseph's Church on Gratiot and Jay St Both Johannes and Elizabeth Becker were buried from Holy Rosary Church as that is where their daughter Mary Becker Pomeroy Cavanaugh attended Church, and she is the one who ministered to her parents in their last days. Elizabeth continued to live in their home of some 50 years over Johannes' cooper shop after his death in 1905 until her own in 1911. After the death of Elizabeth, the cooper shop and the home over it were sold to a Mr. Ott who was a relative of Johannes & Elizabeth's daughter, Sophia Becker Ott. Today Johannes Becker and his wife Elizabeth Friedrichs bodies lie in Mount Elliott cemetery, in subdivision 2, section L, near the fence.. The 5 foot high Becker monument stone is very visible from Mount Elliott St. One does not have to enter the cemetery to quietly visit the Becker family plot. This can be accomplished by parking one's car next to the fence on Mount Elliott St. just south of Kercheval St. But more importantly than the repose of the mortal bodies of Johannes and Elizabeth Becker is the repose of their immortal souls. These, I am most sure, rest in heaven. For Johannes Becker was a just and hard working man who was quite family oriented. He worked hard and shared with his family the fruits of his labor, His family never wanted for the necessities of life. He is in fact, one of the best providers among our forefathers. He was a brave man, coming to America in a time when the Indians were still attacking the white mans' settlements. In fact, while Johannes Becker was fighting the Civil War, Indians attacked the City of Detroit! on the 31st of July, 1863, just 29days after Johannes Becker was injured in the Battle of Gettysburg, Indians attacked the city, and Captain Dalyell and his company were defending our city against this onslaught by the Indians. The battle was fought on Parent's Creek on the ground which is now the peaceful little Elmwood cemetery at McDougall and Lafayette. The Indians slaughtered a large part of Captain Dalyell's company, thus

Parent's Creek was renamed "Bloody Run" in memory of all the soldiers who perished in this battle with the Indians.

Johannes Becker came to America to make a better life for his future family, married and provided well for his wife Elizabeth, and for his children Sophia, Nicholas, John, Mary and Elizabeth. He taught his children the worth of hard work, and when his daughter Elizabeth died in childbirth he so generously raised her children. When his daughter Sophia's husband died at 54 years of age from stone duet in his lungs, Johannes so generously took his daughter and her 3 children under his roof for a year until she regained her emotional strength and could return to her own home. Johannes and Elizabeth were truly upright and God fearing people and our Lord has surely rewarded them richly for their life long struggle to give those of us who follow after them a better way of life than they themselves had. We are all truly grateful to Johannes and Elizabeth for the example they set for us with their devotion to their God, and their willingness to work hard for their God and their family, and thus provide us with a solid foundation on which to build our own lives. We hope that Johannes and Elizabeth will watch over us, their descendents, and guide us in our efforts to live as good a life as they have.