BECKER TOWNSHIP

Becker Township is located in south central Sherburne County, and consisted of 64 sections, the largest in Sherburne County.

Peter Vadnies, who came to the area in 1855, was believed to be the first permanent settler in Becker, which he originally named Marsailles. This was the first established trading post in the Becker area and was located near the present NSP Plant.

A year after Vadnies settled, Nobel R. Crawford, John Wagner, John Sadley and John Curtiss came to the area and made claims just northeast of the present City of Becker. Curtiss settled close to the Elk River and the rapids on the river near his claim still bear the name, Curtiss Rapids.

Crawford, who was the first to settle in that area, brought his wife, Lucinda, and a family of seven children. The Crawfords opened their home for Sunday worship services. A Rev. Palmer was called in to conduct the services. Mrs. Crawford promptly organized the areas first Sunday School.

In the 1857 census the population was recorded as 35 persons.

The railroad reached Becker in 1867. The first depot was built in 1868, and a new, more modern depot was built about 1917 which served the traveling community until 1969 when it was sold and dismantled.

Other early settlers were Andre Anderson, 1866; Jens Peter Anderson, 1869; Edward T. Cox, 1877; William Carley, 1881; Peter C. Jensen, 1875; William Lyon, 1878; Peter Lind, 1870; Henry Stiles, 1873; Swan Swanson, 1870; Rev. Joseph Shepardson, 1869; Andrew Swanson, 1870; Neils Larsen, 1872. The area was originally called Pleasant Valley.

On January 21, 1871, a group of citizens met at School District No. 5 and organized Becker Township. The township itself was named after the Honorable G. L. Becker of St. Paul, who was a real estate agent for the railroad. The first officers elected were George Eaton, Chairman;

L. H. Pratt, Charles Ostergren, Supervisors; J. D. Sadley, Treasurer;
Rev. J. H. Shepardson, Clerk; G. W. Knowlton, Assessor; Joseph Crawford,
Constable; Wm. Eaton, Overseer of Roads; L. S. Stevens and T. E. Stiles,
Justices of the Peace. The board met for 20 years in the District 5 School
House. In 1891 a Town Hall was built in the area which is now in the City
of Becker. This was a two-story 24'x40' building which cost $1165.00. The
bottom floor was rented out for a store and the top story was used for
meetings. It burned in 1911 and the present town hall was built in 1912.
In 1985 the township board, along with the support of the citizens, decided
to let the Great River Regional Library use the town hall as the Becker Branch
Library for 5 years. The board now meets at the Becker City Hall.

The first action of the board was to build a bridge across the Elk River
on the road leading from Becker to Princeton. The cost of the bridge was
$350.00. The board adopted laws of the state regarding fence viewers, cattle
running at large, and other articles. Under that law, cattle were allowed
to run at large during the day from April 1 to October 15. This law was
repealed in 1903.

The annual meetings were well attended by the citizens of the township
in the earlier years. Many residents looked forward to attending the
meeting after a long winter. The election in 1918 for the U.S. Senator
between Charles A. Lindberg, Sr. and Frank B. Kellogg was such a close race
that poll watchers from both political parties were at the Becker Election.
This was one of the few times that there were poll watchers present at any
elections.

The road maintenance in those days was done by the local people working
off their poll tax. Each male citizen of the township gave two days labor
for road work per year, or paid $1.50 per day for hire. A man and team
could earn $3.00 for a ten hour day. Road overseers were appointed and were
in charge of carrying out the orders of the town board.

Because of wet and low land the Snake River residents had to travel north and northwest up to what is now County Road 16 in order to get to Becker. Generally, the roads were laid out the most practical route, that is, on the higher land rather than following the section lines. Many of the low swampy areas they had to go through were corduroyed, which meant cutting yellow tamarack in lengths and laying crosswise, then covering with dirt. Some of these still exist and are still in use today. The ditches were dug by hand, the material thrown into the road and when dry the road was finished by horses, dump wagons, and scrapers. Later on the roads were built with six to eight horse drawn machinery. The first road was established by Petition of seven legal voters on November 6, 1871. It started at the Curtis Rapids Bridge (somewhat west of present Cty. Rd. 23), north to 30th Ave., Fern St., 35th Ave. to Elm St., south on Elm intersecting with County Rd. 4, plus a short branch from the corner of 35th and Elm to the corner of Eagle St.

Carl Tinquist bid $180.00 to build 3/4 of a mile of road which is now County Road 11, then built 1/4 mile on his own at no cost in order to get the road established. Carl Erickson petitioned the road from the Santiago-Becker town line to Santiago.

Gas taxes were collected by the county and in return the county took care of all of the snow plowing and the building of a portion of the roads.

In the early days Becker was known as the hay capitol of the county. So bountiful were the lush hay meadows a hay press was installed by St. Paul businessmen as early as 1867. For many years over 2000 tons were shipped annually. After the turn of the century farmers started planting more and more potatoes. During the digging season it was not unusual to see wagon loads with potatoes lined up for two or three blocks. Potatoe farms have become a large part of the township industry today.

In the late 1800's an application was made for a charter for a bank which was known as the Becker State Bank. This closed in 1925.

A newspaper called The Record was printed in the town in the late 1800's and in 1913 it was sold and renamed the Becker Herald. Editor and Publisher was S. E. Wright.

Becker Township celebrated 100 years of existance in 1971 with a Centennial Celebration. Board members were Clayton Anderson, Chairman; Floyd Olson, Merlin Cox, Supervisors; Bernard Nelson, Clerk; and Lester Olson, Treasurer. Activities included threshing bee, tug-of-war between the city and township, parade, street dance in the evening, pudding eating contest (with blindfolds), costume contest, and many other activities. Their float was awarded first price at the Sherburne County Fair Parade.

The Northern States Power Co. Sherco Plant was originally established in Becker Township. On April 19, 1974 the City of Becker annexed 6 sections where the plant is located. This was done primarily because of the services the city could render to the plant.

At the annual Town Meeting and Election in March, 1978, the township voted to expand the board from 3 to 5 supervisors. The members at that time were Francis Pouliot, Chm.; Melvin Jaconson, C. Jean Clitty, Jerome Edling, and Lester Olson, Supervisors; Alan Myers, Treasurer; and Bernard Nelson, Clerk.

Current members of the board are Michael Bowatz, Chm.; Francis Pouliot, Howard Johnson, Kyle Johnson, Lester Olson, Supervisors; Alan Myers, Treasurer; and Judy Shermak, Clerk.