

Grandpa Frank T Becker – The life of a foundry man

Frank Theodore Becker was born on Nov 9 1873 in Manitowoc WI. Frank was the middle of 7 children to Frank X Becker and Catherine Ramian. After attending St. Boniface School and later public school in Manitowoc, Frank began learning the foundry man's trade by accepting a 4 year apprenticeship at the Richard's Iron Works in Manitowoc at the age of 17 in 1890. His starting wage was 3 cents an hour for a 60-hour week. Overtime was at the same rate.

Frank completed his apprenticeship in Dec. 1894. He then pursued a career as a moulder; working for companies in Geneva IL, Port Washington and Milwaukee. He must have kept ties with Manitowoc / Two Rivers for on Nov 14 1900 he married Louise Simonis, a member of a prominent early Two Rivers family.

Frank & Louise lived in Milwaukee for the next 4 years and had two boys during that time.

In 1904, Frank and his brother Michael started a business named the Becker Manufacturing Company. It is believed that Michael had the up front money and Frank had the technology and foundry skills. Michael's background was that of cigar manufacturer. They rented the building of the former Conrad Werra foundry at 1701 12th street. The Werra foundry was started in 1894 but was discontinued four years later. Frank and Michael purchased the building in 1905. At that time the building was 110' X 70' and had one furnace. Shortly after that they added an additional 45' X 45' to the building, a traveling crane and a second furnace. It was reported that they turned out first class work.

On Jan. 1 1919, the Becker Manufacturing Company was incorporated with a capital stock of \$25,000. Frank was president and Grandma Louise was Vice President and Michael was Secretary – Treasurer. A few years later Michael left the business and became Post Master General of Brillion. It is said that Becker Lake is named after him. Frank bought his brother out in 1945.

Over the years the business grew. In 1911 an addition to the plant was made and in 1923 it was again enlarged, this time being practically rebuilt. The business started off making general castings and as an iron job shop. Over the years they made products for many of the area businesses. They did work for the Mirro Co. and Hamilton Industries. For Hamilton they made the cast iron tables that were used for printing in the early 1900's. They also made pistons and engine blocks for the Kahlenberg Brothers Company, who made marine engines for many years in Two Rivers. Kahlenberg has been located directly across the street from the Becker Manufacturing Co. since 1907. (Kahlenberg Bros. now produces horns for boats and yachts and propellers for larger boats.)

During World War 2, the Becker Manufacturing Co. was 100% dedicated to the war effort and at that time had 11 employees.

I know they made some toys including cast iron banks. Both Aunt Evelyn and Aunt Dolores have cast iron animals and a miniature wood stove made in the foundry. Uncles' Hugo, Roland, Clarence, Edward & Paul all worked for some time in the business. Uncle Frank says that he occasionally worked there on summer breaks, but it was only to keep him out of trouble. Many of the cousins, especially Uncle Hugo's boys worked in the foundry. Some are still in the trade today.

Grandpa Frank Becker died March 17, 1959 at the age of 85.

The foundry closed in the early 1970's due to changes in the environmental laws that made keeping the operations open not feasible.