

THE BECHER PLACE AND RISKE CREEK

A SHORT HISTORY SUMMARIZED FROM THE BOOK "CHILCOTIN: PRESERVING PIONEER MEMORIES" BY THE WITTE SISTERS, AND FROM OLD BECHER DOCUMENTS

Becher dam, Becher prairie, Becher meadow, are familiar names in the Chilcotin and certainly identify the hub of the Riske Creek area.



Riske Creek was settled first in the 1860s by LW Riske, Sam & Ed Withrow. Originally the ranch property was referred to as Riske and later became better known as Becher's prairie. Documents indicate that Alvin Provis and Gerald Dester partnered in preempting DL113 (the home place) on April 19, 1886.

Later Gerald (apparently referred to as George) bought out Alvin Provis and filed the required statement of improvements with the province.

FM "Fred" Becher supported (certified) that filing and Dester became the owner of the home place.

The Witte Sisters, in their book, report that FM Becher and "George" Dester became partners in a trading post on Riske Creek. In 1891 the Trading Post property was included in the Indian Reserve (Toosey Reserve) lands so Becher moved a half mile up the creek. Later, Becher bought Dester's share of the ranch and Trading Post and began building the first hotel and saloon. Dester apparently returned to England with his young daughter and left his Indian wife behind.

Dester had also been area postmaster and Becher took over that roll when Dester moved on. Dester's brand "D" remained with Becher and irons are still on the ranch today, although unused since the current owners created BarM7 ranch with it's own brand. The first telephone line arrived in 1912 and Becher had the first telephone installed in his hotel.



He also brought the first Cadillac into the country and used it as a taxi between 150 Mile House and Riske Creek. The location was strategic as the Cariboo Gold Rush had two roads. One on the east side of the Fraser River (used for light traffic, passengers etc.) and the other on the west side of the Fraser River used for heavy hauling. The Chilcotin with its open, rolling grasslands is excellent cattle country and there was every reason for Becher's hotel to thrive. Becher's prairie was busy with horse races, travellers, ranchers, and relaxing cowboys. Becher had whiskey brought in by the keg from Ashcroft. Fred Becher served all peoples for miles, gave credit, made good and bad business deals and in 1917 married Florence Cole who added a gala ball to the annual events. Following the death of Fred Becher in 1936 (he is buried in the graveyard on the property along with other notable locals).



Florence moved to Vancouver and leased the place to Bert Roberts. She eventually sold it to Geneva Martin of the River Ranch. It was later inherited by her daughter Willena Hodgson who is retired in Williams Lake today. The ranch sat quietly for many years and finally Willena, in 1981, demolished the historic old house before it could fall down.

In 1989 Marcus Nairn, with his nephew Mark and Sally Nairn started bringing Becher Place back to life. The new log home was built in 1989, on the original site and includes some of the original artifacts. A large shop was added a few years later. The old barn remains stately in place since at least 1905 (according to one set of dated initials carved inside). Some of the other old outbuildings remain as well.

Riske Creek continues to wind through the property; the fertile ground supports alfalfa hay, cattle, horses, abundant wildlife and the property continues to leave it's historic mark on the Chilcotin.