



Tragedy was never far away and the Becker family saw more than their fair share of the grim reaper.

As reported in the Dunstan Times -

A sad calamity took place in the Ida Valley on Monday evening December 28<sup>th</sup> 1896, when two lads, Carl and Frank Becker aged 14 and 11 years respectively, were drowned in the Ida Valley Station dam.

The lads were employed at the shearing shed, went bathing alone in the evening after their day's work. As they did not return by 9 o'clock, a party from the shed went in search of them and discovered the clothes of the unfortunate boys on the bank of the dam.

Constable Leese of Ophir, being informed, soon arrived, and after a prolonged search the bodies of the lads were found next morning, lying side by side in about six feet of water.

The dam which is now filled for wool-washing purposes is in some places of considerable depth, and being close to the shed is often visited by the shearing hands for bathing.

It appears that the boys could not swim, and it is thought that one of them must have got beyond his depth, and in the attempt of the other to save his brother both were drowned together.

Both lads are natives of the Valley, and being of quiet, retiring dispositions, were much respected. The parents have the sincerest sympathy of the whole community in their sad bereavement.

These two boys were sons of John Godfred Becker who was born in Altona, Hamburg, Germany, and came out to New Zealand via Australia. He was a blacksmith and set up shop in the Ida Valley. He was eventually killed by a horse he was shoeing and this placed tremendous strain on his wife to keep the family alive.

A contributor of an eulogy to the boys for the *Dunstan Times* felt moved to write;

The world went strongly against Mr Becker, and struggling against heavy odds he centred his heart and soul on his two boys, hoping that some day they would lighten his load of toil. It is hard indeed that his hopes should be blasted at one terrible blow. The two brothers were undivided in their love from infancy. They lived together, they played together, they worked together, they died together, they were buried together.

Both boys are buried in the Moa Creek Cemetery which is atop a strange mound which lies in the centre of farmland beside the now deserted township of Moa Creek near Omakau, Central Otago.

Strangely the gravestone says they died on 31 December.

But there was further tragedy in the wind.

John Becker, youngest son of John Godfred, was in partnership in the Luggate Coal Pit and one night was riding home on his motorbike through Poolburn to see his mother. Headlamps in those days were pretty inadequate and he failed to see Carruths Builders' truck parked with a large pole sticking out across his path. He hit it and was killed instantly. Of the nine children born in the John Godfred Becker family only three survived to make old bones.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz))  
from local newspaper reports of the tragedy.