

Bernhard H. “Bernie” Baker



Bernhard or “Bernie” Herbert Baker was born 6 Sept 1893 in South St. Paul to Bernhard and Emma (Johnson) Baker, who immigrated from Germany and Sweden, respectively, in the late 1880s. In 1900, father Bernhard’s occupation was listed as sausage maker. The younger Bernhard had siblings John, Frank, Andrew, and Sarah; his father remarried after Emma died in 1903 and had another child, Ruth, in 1910. The elder Bernhard Baker died in 1912.

By 1915, Bernard had opened City Drug Store at 161 N. Concord Street with Homer Crandell. He registered for the draft on 5 June 1917 while a resident of 5th Avenue South. Recently married to Gertrude McCormick (1893-1981), he claimed support of his wife as an exemption. He was 23 years old. By October 1917, he had enlisted as 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Aviation Corps, serving overseas in the 21st Aero Squadron. He served for two years.

After the War, he returned to South St. Paul and continued to operate his drug store. He and Gertrude had a daughter, Bernadine Baker, born 20 June 1918. Baker was one of the first to use a plane in a political campaign, dropping literature on the city in March 1919. He was elected Mayor of South St. Paul on 1 April 1919, defeating George Kramer by a proportion of 3:1. He was a member of many organizations, including the VFW, Masonic Lodge, Commercial Club, and Kiwanis.

The South St. Paul Police Department History on its website says, “The returning war hero Bernie Baker would make a clean-sweep of city hall when he took over as mayor and his friends and fellow veterans took over every chair in Council. (Chief) Challberg resigned his post in October and Baker named Andy Robinson the chief of police.” It was the start of Prohibition, and pressures on the new mayor must have been intense.

On 22 Sept 1921, Baker died of pneumonia after being hospitalized for a breakdown. He was only 28 years old. His funeral was held from the First Presbyterian Church and his remains were escorted to Oak Hill Cemetery by a military procession and thousands of city residents.