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BIOGRAPHY OF MAGISTRATE BERNARD P. BECKER

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Honorable Bernard P. Becker died of cardiac arrest at his home on January 2, 1991. At the time of his death, Becker, part-time United States Magistrate, specialized in prisoners' rights cases at the Federal Medical Center in Rochester, in addition to his regular duties. The title of his office was officially changed to United States Magistrate Judge shortly before his death.

Born on April 28, 1938, Becker was originally from New York City, where he attended the New York City Public School system and was graduated from the City College of New York, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1961. After attending the University of Minnesota Graduate Program in Political Science for a year, he entered the University of Minnesota Law School, where he was a member of the Law Review and received his J.D. degree in 1965.

Upon graduation, he returned to New York, was admitted to the New York Bar and served as an attorney with the Criminal Appeals Bureau of the New York Legal Aid Society, where he briefed and argued cases before the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. A year later, he returned to Minnesota to take a position with the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis, where he remained, serving several years as Chief Counsel, until 1973 when he joined the faculty of William Mitchell College of Law. At William Mitchell, Becker taught Civil Procedure, Federal Jurisdiction, Property, Juvenile Law, Immigration Law, Indian Law and Civil Practice Clinic. In 1986, he was appointed part-time U.S. Magistrate and continued as a tenured member of the faculty of William Mitchell until he died.

During his splendid legal career, Becker was well known as a champion of the rights of the disadvantaged. He will be especially remembered as an expert on Native American law, and for his advocacy for the rights of Native Americans. Among his more notable achievements was his successful representation

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of the Leech Lake Band of the Chippewa Tribe in a landmark case which established the primacy of tribal rights to hunt, fish and harvest rice on reservation lands and for winning a unanimous decision from the Supreme Court of the United States that limited the power of the state to impose taxes on Native Americans living on reservation lands. He also served as Chief Counsel to the Joint House-Senate Committee of the Minnesota Legislature that investigated conditions at Stillwater State Prison in 1975-1976. He was a past president of the Board of Directors of the Minneapolis Legal Aid Society and a founder of the immigration law clinic at William Mitchell College of Law, the first clinic to be devoted solely to immigration law in the state of Minnesota.

In addition to his professional accomplishments, Becker was a man of wide-ranging interests. He had a lifelong interest in music and was an opera buff, a sometime pianist and a regular at the Ordway and Orchestra Hall. He was a gourmand and a gourmet cook, especially accomplished in the art of Chinese cuisine, and had a passion for all things related to the railroads. He could recite the routes and schedules of most American lines and took many a vacation for the purpose of riding a particular train in this country and abroad. He would pore through a railroad brochure and schedule with the same delight as a professor of literature reading a limited first edition. His one enduring vice was his lifelong addiction to cigars, which was a joy to his caricaturists and a trial for his nonsmoking acquaintances.

He was, above all, throughout his life, a warm and compassionate man. His love and respect for all things human drew people to him instinctively. Despite his many public achievements he never was a victim of pride and was as comfortable chatting with the corner grocer as he was conversing with a Supreme Court Justice. He was an inspiration to his colleagues, an example to his students and a credit to the Bar of this state. To his close friends and family he was a wonderful and irreplaceable part of our lives and his loss is truly inconsolable.