

Bertha Gast and Hilmer Bergner

Bertha Gast was born September 29, 1887, at Stolp, Pomerania, then a part of Prussia, the eldest child of August Sr. and Albertina Schwinke Gast. She emigrated with her parents to the United States in 1887 to a farm in Marsh Grove Township, Marshall County, Minnesota. Hilmer Bergner was born November 6, 1868 at Slinger, Wisconsin. He came to Argyle, Minnesota in 1886. His parents were Reinhold and Karoline Bergner.

Bertha Gast married Hilmer Bergner in the year 1891. Two children were born to this union:

Oscar Ramon, son Born: June 10, 1895 Died: Sept 18, 1895

Alma, daughter Born: December 24, 1896 Died: June 25, 1969

Bertha and Hilmer lived on a farm near Argyle, Minnesota, when first married, later moving into the village of Argyle. They operated a rooming and boarding house, primarily for teachers, as their home was located directly across the street from the school. Hilmer invented, produced and sold Berner's Salve, a popular and well known home remedy for cuts, wounds and boils. It was marketed in a round, brown-colored tin and according to the label, would cure just about anything. However, having used it myself, I can attest that it was a very effective medicinal aid. Alma took over the business from her father and marketed it for many years. Alma sold the business to Clarence and Edel Gast in 1965 because her children did not wish to carry on the family tradition. I believe in about 1980 it was sold to Carlyle Askeland of Grygla, Minnesota. Bertha was an excellent cook and had a thriving boarding house business. Hilmer did the cleaning and ironing. The door of their home was open to all who came.

My mother, Grace Gast Laken, lived with the Bergners the last two years she attended Argyle High School (1923-1924), working for her board and room. Bergners became her adopted family. Auntie and Uncle are among my favorite childhood memories. Auntie Bertha could get me to do anything! It was like she possessed some special kind of magic along with her wonderful smile. I remember one occasion where I refused to be on the family pictures (for whatever reason I can't remember, except the sun was hurting my eyes). But Auntie put her arm around me, talked to me and soon I was posing for the camera.

Taken from Neoma Laken's family stories.