

Bertha and Hilmer Bergner

Bertha Gast was born September 29, 1871 at Stolp, Pomerania then a part of Prussia, the eldest child of August Sr. and Albertina Schwienkie 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. Hilmer's parents were Reinhold and Karoline Bergner.

Bertha and Hilmer were married in 1891 and they had two children.

Oscar Ramon, born June 10, 1895 and died September 18, 1895

Alma, born December 24, 1895 and 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 Bergner'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. The business stayed in the family when daughter Alma purchased the business. Alma later sold it to Clarence and Edel Gast in 1965. Bertha was an excellent cook and had a thriving boarding house business. Hilmer did the cleaning and ironing. The door to their home was open to all who came. Grace Gast Laken, lived with the Bergners the last two years she attended high school in Argyle, working for her board and room. The Bergners became her adopted family. Grace's daughter Neoma remembers the Bergners very fondly. The following stories are told by Neoma.

"Auntie Bertha could get me to do anything. It was like she possessed some kind of magic along with her wonderful smile. I remember one occasion when 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.

At Christmas time my parents and I would ride the train to Argyle and walk through the snow to Bertha and Hilmer's house from the depot. I was always so excited to see Auntie Bertha, I wanted to run the whole way. At Bergners we would be welcome with gladness, hugs and kisses and much food. We would wait for Grandpa Paul Gast to come and take us to the farm.

In the later years Bertha became more and more forgetful even though her physical condition seemed quite good. She still wanted to cook but would make coffee with soap flakes, etc. So Hilmer had to move all the cooking supplies up on high shelves. It was a very sad time of life. Mother and I visited but Auntie didn't know us. One time Bertha and Hilmer were in a garden when we arrived. Bertha look up with a huge smile and said 'Oh, if it isn't Grace!'. The next minute she slipped back into her confused world and didn't remember mother at all.

As a small child I was fascinated with the pump at the kitchen sink because we didn't have one at home. My mother told me 'No, this isn't something to play with'. However,

dear Auntie Bertha would say 'No, Grace, don't scold her, let her play with it as long as she wants to, it doesn't hurt anything'. Is it any wonder I so dearly loved Auntie Bertha? She loved me, she fed me delicious goodies and she let me play with her kitchen pump. Now as an adult, looking back, I think my mother must have had a terribly spoiled child to take home from Christmas with the relatives. Because my grandparents let me do anything I wanted, also. I thought I was in heaven. But as an adult what I remember most is the unconditional love given me by Auntie Bertha and Uncle Hilmer and that is a priceless memory.

My mother never had any childhood illnesses except red measles and she almost died from those. She came down with them while in high school and living with Bertha and Hilmer. She was very ill but Bertha nursed her day and night and pulled her through without any side effects. Mother always felt guilty because she was suppose to help Auntie Bertha and now she was causing extra work besides, and not able to do her own work. But both Auntie and Uncle kept assuring her it was no bother and they loved her and wanted to take care of her. Mother never forgot this extreme kindness during a severe illness. When I had the red measles and pneumonia at the same time as a child, mother applied the same nursing Auntie had given her and I came through the terrible temperature with absolutely no side effects either. One generation gives wisdom for the next'

Bertha Gast Bergner died September 12, 1943 at Argyle, Minnesota of cerebral arteriosclerosis. Today the diagnosis might have been Alzheimer's Disease. She is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, Argyle on the August Gast, Sr. family plot because she always said that she wanted to be buried next to mama..

Following Bertha's death, Hilmer went to live with his daughter Alma Gonnering at Grygla, Minnesota. Hilmer Bergner died July 13, 1956 at Thief River Falls, Minnesota, surviving Bertha by almost 13 years. Interment was in Woodlawn Cemetery, Argyle on the August Gast, Sr. family plot.