

The Berns Boys Come to Tilston

US immigration to Manitoba was quite common for a while. One particular family left its mark on Tilston.

The tiny village of Tilston has two cemeteries, the Tilston Cemetery just east of town and the Tilston Catholic Cemetery on its western edge. A monument on the Catholic Cemetery grounds commemorates the Catholic Church that once served the community from 1927 until 1993.

One might wonder if the establishment of a Catholic Congregation well after the establishment of the community could tell us something about that community. It seems to come down to the story of one family.

Most of the settlers in southwestern Manitoba came from Ontario, where they had resided for a generation or two after originating in Britain. But there were exceptions – like the Berns family.

Theodore Berns came to America from Prussia, around 1850 and settled near Garnavillo, Iowa. His grandson Francis Xavier received his education at Garnavillo and graduated from Agriculture College at Madison, Wisconsin.



◀ Clarence, Guido & Xavier Berns.

Land around Tilston was available and more reasonably priced than in Iowa, so in 1911, Xavier and his brother Guido came to Tilston. They came with means, and built some impressive buildings on the farm, including a two-storey house, and a large granary that were still in use in 2018.

Beginning in the late 1890's the Canadian Government actively and successfully marketed the advantages of immigration to Canada to communities across the US. Perhaps the Bern brothers saw one of those ads.

More land was purchased in 1913, Clarence (the third son) came to Canada to farm with his brothers.

In short – they established prosperous farms and became prominent citizens in the region. They were a family of note.

So perhaps the community took it in stride when in the early twenties, Mrs. Hilory Berns of Iowa, the mother of Xavier, Guido, and Clarence Berns, donated money she had received from her home estate towards starting a church in Tilston so



▲ The Clarence Berns Home.

that her family would not have to travel so far to go to mass. Other relatives and friends in Iowa also contributed.

The CPR sold lots to the Roman Catholic Archiepiscopal Corporation of Winnipeg for the sum of fifty dollars to build a "Chapel". Archbishop Sinnott, then Bishop of Winnipeg, sent five hundred dollars to Father Alexander McIntyre of Deloraine. This money was donated by Dr. Fred Hanlin through the Catholic Church Extension Society, providing the "Chapel" was named after St. Anthony.

The blessing of the new building took place in the summer of 1927. In 1933, Charlie Neff donated the land for the cemetery just west of town.

The head start provided by Mrs. Berns resulted in a fine new Catholic Church for a relatively small congregation. When it was no longer needed it was sold and relocated just west of Brandon. Driving by one can spot the spire in a wooded lot, and oddly enough it seems as if it belongs.

Source:

R.M. of Albert History Book Committee. *Reflections of Time: A History of the R. M. of Albert. Tilston, 1984.*