

Grandpa Witzel – Notes

Frederick DeBoom Witzel

1st draft, ca 1985¹

Occasionally walking up Funston Avenue on my home for lunch from Sutro School I would run into Grandpa Witzel out for his morning constitutional. He was the image of Santa Claus, a robust, florid pot-bellied character with thinning white hair on top of a round, red face, much given to teasing and small jokes. Most of these were in German and went over my head. He spoke to us in an accented American with a pleasant gargle in his voice. Claude was known as "the little landsman"² because of his very blond hair.

His appearance was most striking. Generally he wore what he felt was the image and appropriate style of a successful, well-heeled German Kaufman or "affairsman": a black swallow tail coat and striped gray trousers without cuffs, dark gray vest and starched shirt with stiff heavy cuffs, starched wing collar and gray tie with gold stick pin, a dark gray Homburg, and a gold knobbed and ferruled

walking stick. Today this get-up appears to be used involuntarily, only by male participants in weddings, or by old-timers in England attending the races at Ascot on the annual Derby when the Queen is driven to the Royal enclosure. He would saunter (along) the upper blocks of Funston Avenue. It looked quite uncomfortable, especially on warm days. We would always exchange a few teasing pleasantries about school, the quality of bakery goods at Helevigs (sp?) or Epllers and the weather.

Grandpa had two subjects of conversation about life in America (or³) several phobias about inadequacies in America. Like all North Germans he held all Prussians, particularly the Junkers and the German monarchy and those from the Rhine Valley⁴, because of their obvious arrogance, in low esteem. President Kennedy's charismatic cry at the Berlin wall in 1962, "I am a Berliner" would have been amusing to Grandpa. He had a high regard for the skill of Bismark – the creator of a mess of German principalities into the Kaiser's Empire – because of his advanced perception of social welfare needs, particularly in the areas of old age pensions, child care, public education, and public literacy.

His other phobia was a complaint over the lack of restrooms in downtown San Francisco, a sharp variance from the clean and attractive facilities in Bremen, Frankfurt and Berlin, and, of course, the famous pissoirs of Paris.



As a younger man

¹ Source: Two and a quarter pages of undated hand-written notes, black ink on lined tablet, with many edits. Found in his briefcase.

² Compatriot. Claude was Dad's middle brother.

³ Text is unclear.

⁴ Text is unclear whether 'those from the Rhine Valley' should go with the North Germans or the Prussians.



Emma has labeled this photo from her Witzel Family Scrapbook "Grandpa Witzel and wife Emma Louise Mueller."

According to Uncle Mo, this Emma is his second wife.

John Frederick Witzel married Anna Wreden on Sept 28, 1881. Anna died in San Francisco in 1933; he lived until 1938.