

My Children's Ancestors

by

Emma M. DeBoom Witzel

1953

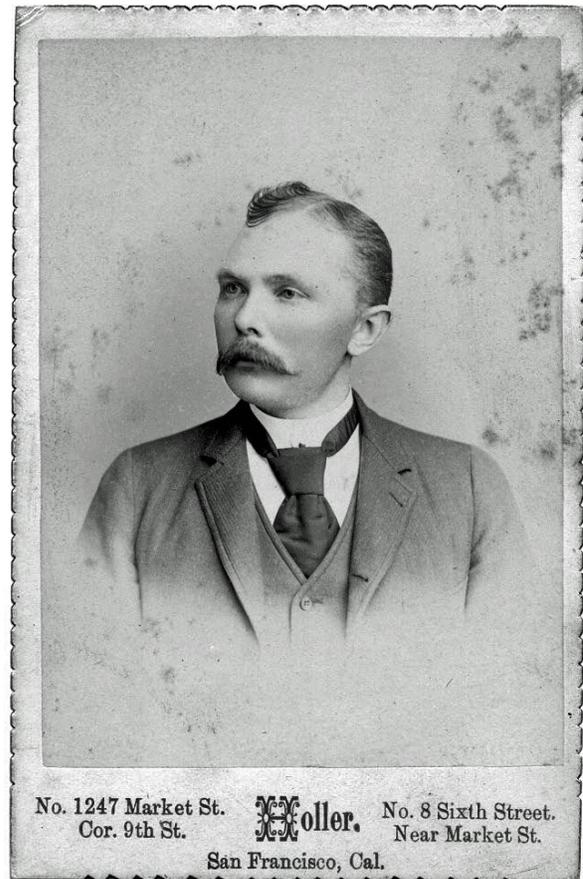


Illustrations added in 2005 by granddaughter Chris Witzel; updated 2011.

I. THEIR PATERNAL ANCESTRY

While visiting Uncle Gus Witzel at his vineyard near Wright's Station in the Santa Cruz Mts. during the summers of 1916-17, he told me of his early childhood in Germany and of his parents.

His father, Franke Witzel, born in 1820 in Oidenburg, and founder of the Witzel Clan in California, was left an orphan at 6 years of age. He inherited a farm containing a brick factory near Oidenburg, in North Germany. A kind uncle reared him and managed the brick factory until Franke was grown to manhood. He soon married the young girl Katrina Eimers, who owned the farm next to his property. They had 7 children, 6 of whom lived to extreme old age. (Mrs. Emily Witzel Baker, the god-mother of C. F. E. Witzel, is now 89 years old (1952) [died Sept. 9th, 1952]. She is the youngest of the 7 children.) His father, Franke, came to America to join the family at Santa Rosa and lived to be 89 years of age (1909). I met him when a bride in 1907 and admired his tall slender body, fair skin, and pink cheeks -- a Witzel trait in some of his descendants. His wife, Katrina, died in 1869 at the age of 40 years. Great-grandpa Franke Witzel is buried in the Santa Rosa cemetery.



This photo is labeled in Emma's hand
"Uncle Gus Witzel, died 1932".

John Frederick Witzel, Emma's Father-in-Law

The second son, John Frederick Witzel, at 16 years of age, to escape German military training, came to America soon after his mother's death.

He lived with a relative in Hoboken, N.J. and worked in a butcher shop for \$3.00 a week, plus board and lodging. He saved his hard-earned wages until he accumulated enough to travel West as far as St. Louis. In 1876 he came to San Francisco and worked as a grocery clerk. He soon bought his own store. From grocery clerk to wholesale-commission business in dairy products was the next step in his career. He soon sent for his old father, his brother Gustave and his small sisters Emily and Ida.

Wreden - Witzel Marriage

Sept. 28th, 1881 John Frederick Witzel married Anna Wilhelmina Christina Wreden, 18-year-old daughter of Claus and Elizabeth Spaar Wreden (They were married in S.F. in 1860.) Westerfield's Bakery were the caterers at the double wedding of Anna Wreden to John Frederick Witzel and of Clara Wreden to Frank Veen, considered the social event of the day in the German colony of San Francisco. Else Veen Scholz is the latter's daughter.

Claus Wreden came to San Francisco in 'the early 1850's from Lintig, Germany. Claus Spreckels, his friend, also hailed from the same village or town. Some Wredens now live in Province of Hanover, town of Kohlen. Like many young German immigrants, Claus Wreden worked in a grocery store, saved his earnings and went into business for himself. His daughter Anna, mother of C.F.E. Witzel and Milton G. Witzel, was born at Stockton and Market Streets in 1863, considered at that time far out of town.



Winnie Wreden at 14 in 1906

Grandma Wreden once told me that the hardest work in her life was saving their first \$5,000 to start the Brewery. They bought land at Greenwich & Taylor Sts (now the site of the Crystal Baths) and built a brewery there, also built a large home for the large family of 5 children, Grandpa Spaar [Elizabeth Spaar Wreden was born in Hessen, Darmstadt, Germany] and his little daughter Marcy (Mrs. Cox). Cooking for a family of nine was a daily task.

The birth of Frederick DeBoom Witzel in 1909 conferred the title of great-grandmother upon her.

She had the foresight to exchange the plot in odd Fellow's Cemetery at Geary St. & 1st Ave. for a large one in Mt. Olivet Cemetery where most of the Wredens and Witzels are buried. The tall chocolate monument was hauled from one cemetery to the next by a truck and horses.

When Grandpa Wreden died in 1898 he left property etc. valued at over \$200,000 (100% dollar value!) Fire, earthquake, Prohibition, depression and clever manipulation of the brewery stock by Winnie Wreden's conniving lawyer all helped to deprive the Witzel branch of the family of its just share of Grandpa Wreden's hard earned fortune.

Two of the Wreden sons, Charles and William, were charter members of the Corinthian Yacht Club.

Claus Franke Emil Witzel

Claus Franke Emil Witzel was born to John Frederick and Anna Wilhelmina Christina Witzel on Dec. 6th 1882. His brother Milton Gustave Witzel was born October 17th 1884. Because the older boy resembled his father he was nicknamed "Freddie" and known in life as Fred.

He attended the S.F. Public Schools until 15 years of age and then attended fashionable **St. Matthews Military School** in San Mateo (now the Brewer Tract) for 3 years. He also attended Heald's Business College. He joined the Corinthian Yacht Club in 1903 and sailed the "Siren" and "Merope".



St Mathews School



Emma DeBoom & Fred Witzel, 1905

He married Emma Marie DeBoom on June 22nd, 1907 in the DeBoom family home at 1777 Page Street.

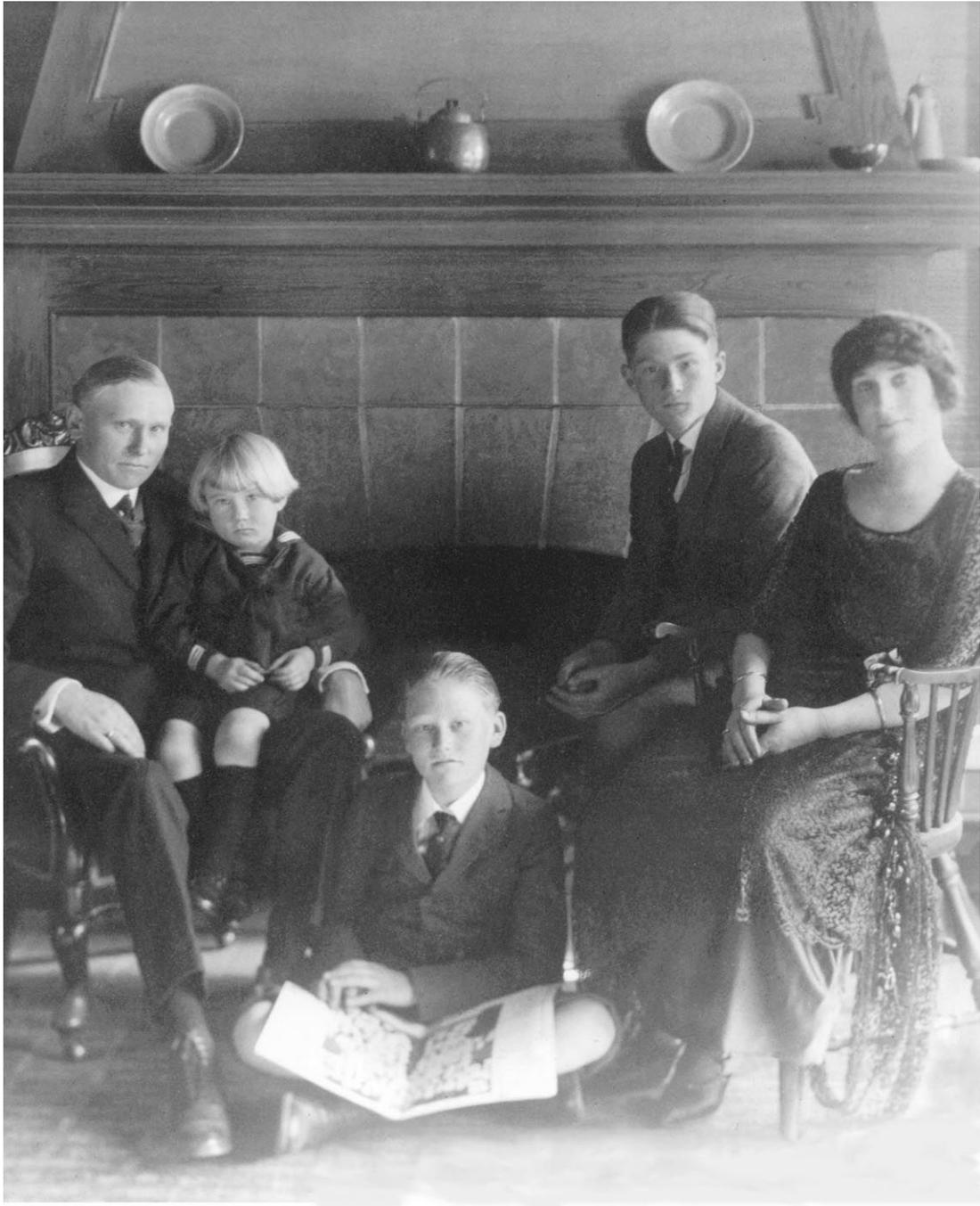


Fred & Emma, Paradise Cove 1905



Fred Witzel & Siren, 1905

Three sons are Frederick DeBoom Witzel, born at 757 Cole St. Mar. 31st, 1909; Claude Romain Witzel, born at 134 Clayton St. Nov. 17th, 1911, and Everett Marsily Witzel, born in Children's Hospital April 29th, 1919.

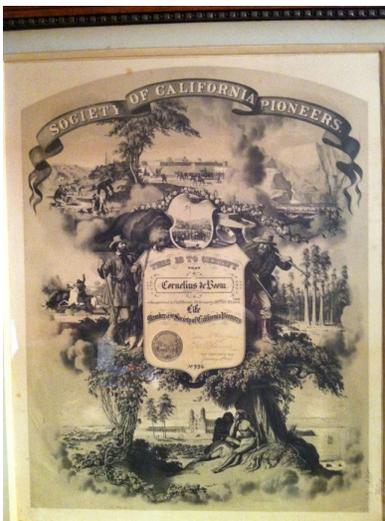


II. MY CHILDREN'S MATERNAL ANCESTRY

My father, Romain Camille DeBoom (1839-1912) often told us children of his boyhood in Denderliëw (lion's tooth), Belgium, sailing boats on the Scheldt River and receiving his education at the College of the Christian Bros in Antwerp where the order was founded. That same Catholic order of Brothers is in charge of St. Mary's College in Oakland suburb, Moraga. My father also told how his grandfather DeBoom in 1815, hearing the cannonading at Waterloo between the English and Napoleon, hustled his large family of wife and 12 children aboard his sailing vessel and sailed up the Scheldt River. The DeBoom family owned a fleet of sailing vessels which visited ports in different parts of the world. The offices of De Boom et Cie. were at Valparaíso and at Santiago, Chile. Here they bought nitrates to ship back to Europe to sell to farmers to enrich the soil. They brought to the Americas every kind of European product from perfume to champagne, tools, etc.



Romain Camille DeBoom,
Emma's Father



Capt. Cornelius DeBoom, Romain's uncle and owner of several sailing ships, was at Valparaíso, Chile in 1848 when he heard that gold had been discovered in California. He set sail for San Francisco arriving here on February 18th, 1849.

The large certificate in our hall testifies to the important event in the DeBoom family.

[This certificate is now (2011) located in the Novato home of Ronald Witzel. Ed.]

On subsequent trips other members of the family came to San Francisco. Peter Romain DeBoom, god-father of Romain Camille DeBoom, helped to fight the several fires that destroyed the warehouses along the waterfront. In 1857 he contracted pneumonia after assisting in fire-fighting and died within a few days. He was buried in the Mission Dolores Cemetery at 16th St. & Dolores St. but I could not find his tombstone, the school having built a playground over that part of the cemetery.

The DeBoom family lived in South Park and DeBoom Street is near by. It is a short street with warehouses fronting on it. In the steel box in this breakfast room are hand-written documents of property owned by the family. One piece was on 2nd Street. These documents are valuable as family mementos of former wealth of 100 years ago.

First Brick Building Destroyed in 1906 Fire

Cornelius DeBoom built the first brick office building in San Francisco known as the Court Block at 636 Clay St. He brought the bricks from Belgium in the hold of his sailing vessel as ballast. That property is now covered with a large garage with frontages on Clay and Merchant Streets near the Hall of Justice which was the City Hall in early days.

My father, Romain C. DeBoom, assisted Mr. Bancroft, the historian, by lending him valuable papers of early San Francisco history. These papers were destroyed in the fire of April 18th, 1906 when so much of San Francisco was destroyed by earthquake and the resulting fire. The Court Block at 636 Clay St. was dynamited by the Fire Department attempting to block the fire. The Swiss Helvetia Insurance Company of France & Switzerland welched on their insurance policies and we lost the property.

13 Acre DeBoom Tract

When Peter Romain DeBoom, the god father of 18 year old Romain Camille DeBoom, died in 1857 he left a tract of land of 13 acres on Mission Street opposite old St. Mary's College (now St. Mary's Residential Park) to his god-son Romain (my father) in trust for the latter's un-born children. In Belgium in those days such a bequest was legal, but not in California. The 13 acres are known as the DeBoom tract.

In the early days the land was rented out as a vegetable garden, but in the late 1880s the land was surveyed, streets, sewers, and sidewalks built, and small houses began to dot the landscape. A Mrs. Johnson, a Catholic convert, bought the northwest corner of Mission and Bosworth Streets and presented it to the Catholic Church. St. John's Church and the Ursuline Convent are built on that corner.

My father named Bosworth St. for family friends, Marsily Street for my mother's maiden name, Rousseau St. for a Belgian friend, father of Charles and Oliver Rousseau of Yachting and building fame.

DeBooms and DeLaurencels

My father's brother Dr. Benoit DeBoom served on the battlefield during the Franco Prussian War of 1870 when France lost L'Alsace-Lorraine.

The beautiful miniature of the two aunts of my father, Frederica Johanna and Virginia DeBoom was painted in 1849 by the finest painter in Brussels. (It must be shielded from dampness.) That branch of the family married into the French nobility.

Frederica married a DeLaurencel. Their daughter Marie married le Comte de Sieyes - and their daughter Angelique married le Baron de Poliniere of Grenoble, France. Two wars have destroyed their wealth. A widow conducts the castle at Grenoble as a boarding house for American students studying at the university of Grenoble.



Marsily Family



My mother's ancestors are the Marsily and Gerhardi families.

The Marsily family were originally in the shipping business in Antwerp where my mother, Caroline Regine Christine, was born in 1851. My cousin Wm. Marsily, is a retired colonel in the Belgian army. If alive, lives in Brussels.

[This photo is labeled on the back in Emma's hand. "Marsily Children photographed to surprise their parents William Marsily and Emma Marsily on their 25th wedding anniversary in 1873. Left to right: Jeanie, Emma, Harry, Gerorge (back row), Caroline, Adolphe (back row), Charles." Ed.]

The English branch of the Gerhardt family helped to lay the cable in 1866 between England and America. My 2nd cousin, Chas. Gerhardt, is employed in the communication dept. of London. Another cousin, Wm. Gerhardt, writes articles for the British Broadcasting System. His great-grandfather and great-grand uncle went to Smolensk in Russia one hundred years ago or more and established a cloth factory. They became wealthy and married daughters of English families living in Smolensk. They sent their sons to Oxford and Cambridge universities. In 1917 the Communists confiscated their factory, homes, bank accounts, etc. and forced the Gerhardts to flee for their lives. They returned to England. The Gerhardt family (Chas.), with whom I correspond, are related to the Burgoyne family of Philadelphia who print the Burgoyne Xmas cards.

Leah Eldred Marsily was my mother's English step-grandmother who loved her 3 step-granddaughters so deeply that she left them her fortune. She owned property at Spa--a famous watering place in Belgium. The Marsily tomb is still there. She also had property in London which was sold in 1933 because of the English law that no alien can own English land more than 99 years. My English teaspoons and 3 forks belonged to her, also sugar tongs--they are more than 100 years old.

Emma's Mother

My mother, Caroline Regine Christine Marsily DeBoom, was educated in the German Lutheran Church School in Antwerp. She spoke five languages fluently. Grandpa and Grandma Witzel always commented how well she spoke German.



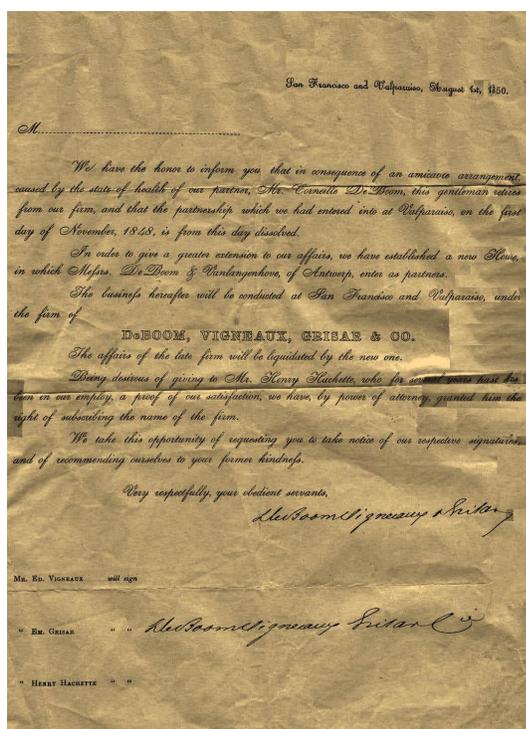
Caroline Regine Christine Marsily DeBoom,
Emma's mother



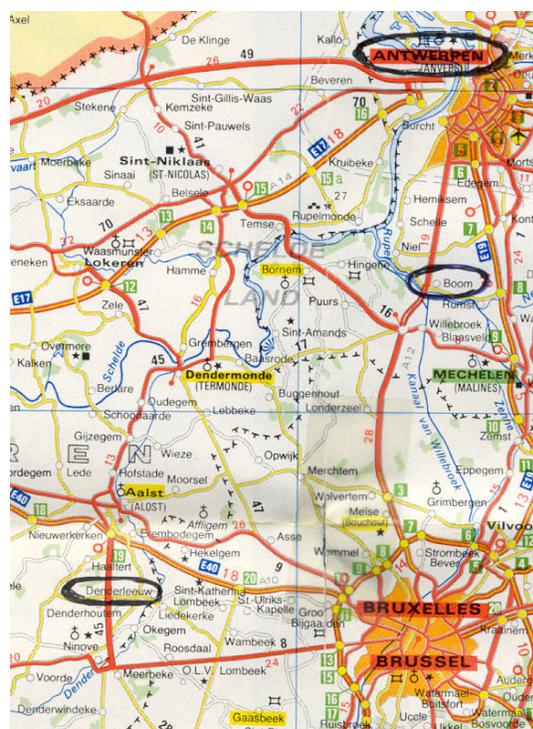
Marie DeBoom, died 1881, Emma's grandmother

Uncle Cornelius DeBoom, Belgian Consul

Uncle Cornelius DeBoom was the first Belgian Consul in San Francisco in 1850. At the request of King Leopold I he established the Belgian Consulate. My father was offered the same position in later years, but refused it, preferring private life.



Announcement of partnership of DeBoom, Vigneau, Grisar & Co. at San Francisco and Valparaiso August 1st 1850.



Denderleeuw (Lion's Tooth), Boom & Antwerp in Belgium

A mining stock holder once asked my father to purchase for him in Paris a pearl set of 3 shirt studs. When father returned here with the studs he inquired at the hotel for his mining friend. He was told that because of the dropping mining stock market the gentleman had committed suicide. So father kept the pearl studs and years later presented each daughter with a pearl ring which I still wear.

To learn the English language correctly my father visited the churches on Sunday morning surrounding Union Square so as to hear good English, advised by his English teacher. He was disappointed with the orthodox "hell and damnation" sermons of the 1870's, but enjoyed Dr. Stebbin's intellectual sermons at the Unitarian Church. Hence years later he sent his four children to that church.

Napa

In 1881 he bought 50 acres of vineyard in Napa on the road to Calistoga. Four children were born there. In 1890 the place was sold and the family moved to San Francisco. My father loved his children deeply and devoted his life to their care and education. At the early age of eight years I accompanied him to matinee operas at the old Tivoli Theatre, also to art galleries, political meetings, Golden Gate Park etc. He enjoyed beautiful paintings. His early life in Paris influenced his education considerably. He left his children a splendid example of good American citizenship.



The DeBoom family in Napa, 1889: William John, Camilla Regina (Mimi), Romain Camille, Frances Caroline (Fanny), Caroline Regine Christine Marsily, Emma Marie. [Ed.]