

THE HUNDRED YEARS OF A FAMILY BUSINESS

by

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How can one relate the events of a hundred years, even those of a single family and the business which it nourished and which nourished it, in the course of a single evening? How is one to know what to include in so brief an account, and yet tell the story as it truly happened - especially if he himself is a member of the family and knows things which he thinks should not be told, and wonders about much more which he does not know, in spite of abundant records?

The records do not disclose what it was really like to leave one's native land to seek employment abroad, then to journey unexpectedly across the ocean to see how it would go in America, to send for one's patrimony to help purchase a business, to marry and have children and see some of them die in their infancy and the others grow to youth and maturity in surroundings so different from the beloved homeland. They give for the most part only circumstantial evidence of the toil, of the long hours, of the hopes and discouragements, the modest progress and the setbacks of a small business largely conducted in a foreign tongue. For later years they reveal the steps leading to expansion and new ventures, but they do not show how they came about - the family discussions, the arguments that prevailed, the anxieties that there must have been, the calculation of risks, the interplay of personal ambitions, sense of duty, parental affection, and family pride, or, still later, the effect of marriages which brought in-laws to the family scene, or of distance as some members of the family moved to far parts of the country.

How important and how lasting were the inevitable tensions and divisions, and how did it happen that the family persisted as an entity, mutually concerned in the well being of all of its members?

Obviously, I cannot tell the story fully, or with entire truth. Even if fully told, there would be little that would be remarkable in it, and the business in itself is a small one as businesses go. Even the survival of the business for a full century under one family's ownership and management is far from being unique. Most of the records and material which an objective historian might examine would appear dull to him. Perhaps an imaginative writer, a novelist, could use them better, breathing life into them, and fleshing out the bones which these records mostly are. But there are pulse beats in them, too. What, for example, might a novelist do with an undated notation written in the back of an account book by my Uncle Irving, who was the one chiefly responsible, I think, for the company's expansion, and who was my employer when I went to work at the furniture store? In this memorandum - written, I would guess, somewhere between 1917 and 1920 - he wrote about his father's will, about the family as an entity, and about his own abilities, and his conviction that if he wished to do so he could take everything within a few years and become the sole owner. This, he said, he did not want to do, and he added, "Lord, please have my brothers and sisters see this".

Whether any of them ever saw it I have no way of knowing, but there was a generous streak in Uncle Irv which I think all

of them knew and appreciated and felt to be genuine. The memorandum is interesting because it suggests that there were other possibilities, and that there might have been a different outcome; but as I said, I am not the one to tell the story in all of its truth and completeness. Rather, I shall try to tell it from my own point of view, almost as a personal narrative, using the familiar names which I have always used, selecting the material which has seemed most interesting to me, and telling something about my own involvement as a part of this history.

A place to begin is on a grassy slope below Observatory Drive, where Elizabeth Waters Hall now stands, on a beautiful October afternoon in 1929. The autumn sun sparkled brightly on the surface of Lake Mendota and warmed the surrounding hills as I sat there looking out over the familiar scene and wondering what lay ahead of me. I had graduated from the university two years before, had gone to Europe for a year of reading and travel, had returned to the university and was now in my second year of graduate work in history. The work was going well enough, but I was not at all sure of choices that I had made along the way; I did not want to retrace my steps, to make new choices; the road ahead looked uninviting, and I felt trapped. Suddenly, with the abruptness and unexpectedness of a vision, the thought came to me that I did not have to go on with what I was doing, and that an alternative was available. The thought and my decision were simultaneous; I would discontinue my studies in the graduate school, would give up my plan to have an academic career, and would go to work in the family business which my grandfather had started some sixty years before.



Perhaps it was the alchemy of that golden afternoon which worked in me - for I had a deep awareness of the beauty of these surroundings and knew that it was here that I would like to spend the rest of my days - but the wonder is that I had never until then given serious thought to making the family business my career. I would not be going uninvited, as Uncle Irv had called me to his home in the spring of my senior year, had asked me about my plans, and had told me that I would always be welcome if I should wish to go to work at the store. I had scarcely given it a thought at the time, but now this invitation became the doorway through which I entered into an entirely different plan for my life.

There were other factors, of course, which must have predisposed me in this direction. I think that I had always felt a certain identification with the furniture store, which I did not feel in the same way for the funeral home which was headed by my other uncle, Arthur Frautschi, or for my father's fuel business, which was an entirely separate enterprise. From earliest childhood I remembered the appearance and even the smells of my grandfather's old store on King Street, across from our present one and up toward the corner. The round oak dining tables were placed three high on top of each other along one side of the narrow room, and the dining chairs hung from hooks in rows across the high ceiling. The smells were probably a blend of leather and of the fillings used in upholstered furniture in those days, together with the glue and finish odors from Grandpa's shop at the rear of the building. I dimly remembered, too, the family living quarters upstairs, above the store, and the front parlor overlooking the street.

I remembered the snowy day in the fall of 1913 when the new store building at 219 King Street was formally opened, and my brother Walter and I stood at the door handing carnations to the visiting ladies. I had memories of working at the store before Christmas during my high school years, and of having furniture pieces which I made in manual training sent there to be completed by Mr. Geiger, the Swiss cabinetmaker. He upholstered a rocking chair that I made, and put the finish on a Queen Anne dining table which was my final project. When I became old enough to drive an automobile, it seemed natural for me to ask Uncle Irv to let me borrow his store car when I needed one, since we had no car in our immediate family at that time.

Then during the university years there were initiations and parties in the old beer cellar under the warehouse. Both Walter and I made use of this wonderful place from time to time, and it acquired a certain fame on the campus and is still recalled occasionally by persons who remember how they were paddled down there in the eerie light of a flaming candle. The cellar is a long tunnel-like room, or series of two rooms, with vaulted masonry walls and ceiling, about 15 feet wide, 12 feet high at the center, and 110 feet long. It was reached by a rickety stairway through a trapdoor in the floor of the basement of the older part of the store, which in former days had been the Breckheimer Brewery. It stretched toward Wilson Street under the old ice house, now our warehouse, and was the place where the beer was aged. It is still there, far underground, but the only use we make of it now is to blow air out of it to cool our office and part of the store in summer.

Whatever the factors which conditioned it, my decision was made, Uncle Irv bade me welcome, and my work at the store began at the end of the semester, in January, 1930. I had much to learn, and had to become accustomed to long and regular hours, since the store was open from eight to six o'clock daily, and until nine on Saturday evenings. Under the tutelage of Millard Oiler, a knowledgeable and very kindly man who was the buyer and my uncle's assistant at that time, I began the long and still continuing process of learning something about furniture and rugs, and how to select, display, and sell them.

The impulses which had drawn me, perhaps unconsciously, to the family business also made me curious about my grandfather, whom I remembered but dimly, and the early history of our family. This was strengthened by my visits to our relatives in Switzerland at Christmas in 1927 and again after I was married, when Grace and I went abroad in the fall of 1932. The relatives mostly live in Turbachtal, a valley not far from Gstaad, now a noted resort center, in the district of Saanen, in Canton Bern. They are farmers for the most part, but also include school teachers, pastors, managers of cooperative stores or Konsums, and the like. Through many visits by various members of our family to this beautiful Heimatland, the relationships have been renewed through four generations, and we know these people better than we do many of our American cousins.

My sources for the early history were at first my grandfather's diaries, which he kept throughout his adult life, always written in his fine German script. Although his entries were brief and not very self-revealing, he did regularly record,

in addition to the weather and the visitors he had had each day, the anniversaries of significant dates in his early life, and sometimes of more recent events. The entry for Thursday, October 26, 1905, will give an idea of how the diaries read:

"Pleasant day, evening a sprinkle of rain.

"Visits from  
Emil  
Miss Ida Heim

"Started a fire in the coal stove. One day earlier than last year.

"43 years since departure from cabinetmaker Mores, Canton de Veau, Switzerland. Duration 1 month and 3 days, from September 22, 1862 to October 26."

From numerous entries of this sort I began to put together a chronology of his movements and the people he worked for, from the time he first left home until he eventually settled in Madison. I also found that at the front or the back of the diaries he listed his children and their birth dates, his brothers and their wives and children, a necrology, and other vital information. Sometimes he used these same books for family and personal financial accounts, and each year he up-dated a long list of articles of furniture which he had made since 1869, the year he founded his business. By 1910, the list included among many other things 1275 picture frames, 16 bookcases, 22 bureaus or commodes, 21 window cornisses, 19 wardrobes, 47 kitchen cabinets, and, representing the funeral side of the business, 1512 rough boxes. There are account books, too, written in English, reflecting a sparse economy. On May 11, 1883, for example, to choose a page at random, his sales were a bedstead for \$4.00, four chairs for \$2.00, a coatrack for 20 cents, and four more chairs for \$4.40.

Then there are letters. I became aware of these only gradually. In 1946 my father brought back from a trip to Switzerland three letters which Grandpa had written in 1868, 1869, and 1889. I puzzled out the faded old script and turned them into English, and later there were others which were returned to us. Recently I have examined a quantity of letters which Grandpa himself saved, letters from home and from his brothers, some of them dating back to his early youth, and they have yielded new information.

My grandfather was Christian Frautschi, the fourth of six sons born to Abraham and Maria Magdalena Frautschi, whose maiden name was also Frautschi. One of their sons died when he was in his early twenties and still unmarried, two stayed in Turbachtal and left the families that we know there now, and three, including Christian, eventually came to this country. They were preceded by their Uncle Jacob, the brother of Abraham, who left the valley with his family in 1852 and came to America. For \$100 he purchased 80 acres of land near a place called White Mound, Wisconsin, in an almost unsettled valley north of Plain, in Sauk County. I have a letter which this Jacob Frautschi sent back to Switzerland at the end of the year 1852, full of interesting detail about the two room house and stable he built, the prices for cows and produce, and the potential he saw for the area. He said that the valley was two hours long and had only two families, but could support 1,000 cattle, and he told his brother Abraham that if he wanted to come, he could stay with him and his family until he could get his own house built. It was in fact to this

farm that my grandfather went when he came to America fourteen years later. I ran across the name White Mound in the diaries, and finally located this extinct village and the farm which had once been Jacob's. In an old overgrown cemetery on a hill-top a mile or two away I found a monument with <sup>the</sup> name of Jacob Frautschi and the dates 1804-1884. All other trace of the family is gone from that valley, and if this great-great uncle has living descendants, we have no knowledge of them, but he provided what was undoubtedly an important element in our story.

My grandfather was born on October 20, 1839, and his years of wandering began before he was 17 years old, in 1856. He worked first at a flooring factory in Aigle, in the Rhone valley, upstream from Lake Geneva and the famed Castle of Chillon. Then he went to Geneva and spent more than two years there learning cabinetmaking from his Uncle Isaac, whom he referred to as his master. Whether this Isaac Frautschi was an uncle on his father's or his mother's side I do not know. Following this he worked for nearly a year for a cabinetmaker named Rudolph Frautschi back in Saanen, and after that he was with a Peter Frautschi for a full year in Ong. Possibly these were relatives, but it is not stated. Other places where he worked were Bule, Oron, Neushatel, Sion, Aigle on two more occasions, Ormont, Lausanne, and Neuemberg, for periods varying from seven days to five and a half months, and for employers listed as flooring factories, cabinetmakers, and brosserie, or brush factories. There were periods of illness, too, and visits with his parents in Saanen. In the spring of 1861 he went to Thun for a health treatment, and a year

later he spent six weeks at home with a disorder which he called "Nervenfieber".

His last employment in Switzerland was at the Brosserie in Aigle, which he left at the end of August, 1863. He visited his parents once more for five days - the last time he ever saw them, as it turned out - and then left for Paris. I have not discovered the reasons for this move, but his Paris years seem to have been an unhappy time in his life, and for part of them at least he did not have work in his chosen craft. For six weeks he worked for a cabinetmaker named Fente on the Rue de Beauvais. For a time he was a kitchen helper, and for a month he was out of work. In April, 1864, he became a garçon, or waiter, at an institution on the Rue de la Clef, and remained there until the first of June, 1866. During this relatively long period of employment he suffered a serious illness, was taken to a hospital, and on March 2, 1865, as he recorded annually, "I fought at the brink of death, but through the grace of God I became well again". On April 5 he was able to return to the establishment on the Rue de la Clef.

During the summer of 1866 he worked for a Monsieur Pompée, whose imposing name was matched by the flourish with which he wrote it. This employment terminated on August 29, 1866, a date which became a bench mark in Grandoa's history, faithfully noted in the diaries year after year as the day on which his brothers Peter and Jacob arrived in Paris. No other comment or explanation appears <sup>in the diaries,</sup> except that he left Paris on September 1, and sailed from Le Havre two days later with his brother Jacob on the journey to America.

Family tradition has held that he came on short notice in place of one of his brothers who had fallen ill or suffered an accident, using the brother's steamship ticket. Recently I have tried to learn more about what really happened by examining letters which Grandpa saved, and which I find it very difficult to read, together with the brief entries in the tiny diary of 1866. Grandpa's brother Peter was already in France, apparently working in a place called St. Gille. He wrote to my grandfather in Paris saying that the wife of their Uncle Jacob, the one who had come to America in 1852, had died, and that he was again asking whether some of his relatives would come over. Peter thought that there would be advantages in working in America, and by midsummer it was settled that Peter and Jacob, another brother who was still in Saanen, would go. However, early in August Peter became seriously sick with a fever and entered a hospital, and although he soon wrote that he was improving, he doubted that he would be strong enough to make the trip. At the same time, in midAugust, my grandfather was being urged by his brother John to return home to Saanen. John wrote that he understood that Christian had lost his position in Paris the previous May, and he upbraided him for not having disclosed his situation in his letters home. He said that with the other brothers leaving, there was serious question as to how the work at home would get done; and as for the future, he said that my grandfather could have the choice of the hay lands in the valley, or the upper slopes. Abraham, the father, added a marginal note urging Christian to come home, saying, "We have food and clothing and work for you". Another letter



from Peter suggests that perhaps my grandfather did wish to return, and he urged him to write to Saenen and declare himself. I would like to be able to read the record more clearly. It is hard to know whether the years in Paris actually were unhappy ones, or whether there was some barrier between ~~Grandpa~~ <sup>my grandfather</sup> and his father which prevented him from returning to Switzerland, or whether the lure of the new country across the Atlantic proved irresistible. At any event, Grandpa did take Peter's place and set out for America with his brother Jacob, and from that event the rest of our story unfolds. Peter, incidentally, followed his brothers seven years later, and settled in Otter Tail County, Minnesota. Jacob worked at various places in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and finally made his home in St. Paul.

My grandfather spent the first winter with his Uncle Jacob on the farm at White Mound in Sauk County, but in the spring he set out once more as an itinerant journeyman. On October 17, 1867, he secured employment with Darwin Clark in Madison, remaining until December 12. Clark was a cabinetmaker who had come to Madison in June, 1837, to work on the first capitol building, at the very beginning of the city's history, and was a prominent citizen. Older members of this club will remember his daughter, Mrs. Frederick K. Conover, who attended our meetings at the College Club until she reached an advanced age, and who died in 1963 at the age of 99. After his stay in Madison Grandpa worked in Sauk City for two months, following which he was employed by a Mr. Baldwin in Baraboo, from February 18 until October 7, 1868. This came to an end with

the collapse of the hops raising industry which flourished for a time in Wisconsin, with Baraboo as a principal center. One of Grandpa's letters home gave a detailed account of how the farmers had given up wheat and other crops because of the greater profit in hops, how they had gone into debt to purchase the needed equipment and to pay the costs of bringing 25,000 pickers into the area, he said, from cities as far away as 100 and 150 miles, and how the price had fallen that year to 10 or 15 cents as compared with a range of 50 to 60 cents the year before. In the ensuing ruin there was unemployment and Grandpa left, adding that he was fortunate to receive his pay.

Grandpa wrote this letter from Mazomanie, where he next found employment with a man named Reul, and it was while working there that he entered into a contract with Gottlieb Krebs in Madison for the purchase of the latter's Saarg and Schreiner Geschäft, or coffin and cabinetmaking business. He apparently had known Krebs since the year before, since he recorded that he had spent the night with someone named Krebs when he first came to Madison and went to work for Darwin Clark. On November 26, 1868, Thanksgiving Day, he came <sup>to Madison</sup> here again, and on the following day the purchase contract was signed. The business was located on South Webster Street, "Opposite No. 1 Engine House", according to the advertisements. The transfer was to occur the following April, at which time Grandpa was to pay \$1,000 in cash and to give his note for the balance, payable in six months. From inventories and canceled notes, on which the interest rate was 10 per cent, it appears that the amount he paid was \$1,434.

During the intervening months he remained in Mazomanie until January, then went to McGregor, Iowa, where he worked for a Mr. Schuler. His diaries marked the date March 27 as the "end of 10 years, 2 months, and 11 days as journeyman and helper". He also recorded year after year that on March 28 he spent the night in McGregor "under the open sky, and wrestled with God in prayer". Meanwhile he was corresponding with his brother Jacob, who sent him \$100, and with his parents, who sent him money, apparently as part of his inheritance. In writing to thank them he said:

"I actually received 377 gold dollars. The gentlemen of Bern take very large bites.....In fact for their trouble or courtesy in issuing the draft they took 22 gold dollars or 110 francs.....I shall never again ask for any money from my homeland by draft, but rather shall take the rest by hand.....At the time that I changed the gold into paper money, the rate was low;.....one gold dollar brought 1.30 in paper, and the 377 dollars produced 489 in paper; then a few weeks later gold climbed to 1.40, and if I had been able to make the exchange at that time, I would have gained 37 dollars."

On April 15, 1869, my grandfather took over the business from Krebs, and this is the date that we have always regarded as the founding of our business. He recorded it in the later diaries, with the repeated observation, "To this day the Lord has helped. To Him alone be praise, glory, and thanks." The business seemed to start out well, and writing to Switzerland in July, 1869, Grandpa said that he was quite pleased. He had already made sales totaling over \$300, but he pointed out that he also had expenses, and said that he was not likely to grow rich, since this was a moderately priced business. He went on,

"I carry on my business with a certain amount of anxiety, chiefly because it involves writing in English; for I have to deal with English businessmen in other cities.

For example from New York I order metal coffins, lacquer, varnish, and the like; from Connecticut and Cincinnati silver and upholstering materials and the like for fitting up the coffins; from Chicago and Milwaukee walnut and other types of wood. Although I am still weak at writing English, so far I have had no delays. But having business letters written by others is not done here; if one does that, he doesn't look like a businessman, and so I contrive as best I can. Along with my business I am still doing other cabinet work. When I must take a body to the burial ground with the hearse, I hire a man who provides two horses, to whom I must pay 5 dollars for each trip. For poor people or children, naturally one doesn't use the hearse."

He continued to do well, and in the following May he purchased a new hearse for \$1,492.50, getting an allowance of \$136.75, presumably for an old hearse he had acquired from Krebs, and signing notes for the balance, again at 10 per cent.

He was not so preoccupied with his business, however, as to be unmindful of his obligations to the Lord God. He was a deeply religious man, and in a long letter which he wrote at this time, he reassured his mother, particularly, on this score. He said that there was no reason to worry because he had left the German Reformed congregation here in Madison, and had joined the Evangelische Gemeinschaft, or Evangelical Association. This was a German language church developed along Methodist lines among the Germans of Pennsylvania in the previous century; some years ago it merged with the United Brethern to become the Evangelical-United Brethern Church, which in turn was merged nationally with the Methodist Church only last year. In his letter my grandfather said that the members of the Reformed church here were free-thinkers, uninterested in repentance and conversion. As for himself, he went to church twice on Sunday and also to the Sunday School,

where he helped with the little children, and also to Wednesday night prayer meeting.

Then he wrote about his decision to come to America:

"Two years ago I had a view toward going into farming.... Then I decided to devote the rest of my days to my profession, although cabinetmaking work is very poorly paid here because there are so many factories; indeed I would have been able to establish myself just as well in Europe; and carpentry offers employment here only during the summer. But my present business pays materially better. It seems to me, if one has lived for 12 years abroad, as I have, under the authority of others, it is his duty and mission to become independent...Moreover, if you, dear parents, could know the evils of a journeyman's life..., you would thank God that I am now free...and not thoroughly ruined.... Disregarding the physical inconveniences of the journeyman's life, please consider how one runs into danger of becoming infected, dissipated, and poisoned through the leaven of the lewd and godless company of journeymen by whom one is constantly surrounded, by day and by night, working, eating, and sleeping...Although when I left Europe I didn't rightly know what I was doing, and my spirit and mind were wrapped in darkness, it is now my unshakable belief that I am here through God's wise decree, and I can say that the Lord has done everything well...However, Switzerland and especially my own native place - my father's house - remain unforgettable, and I cannot deny that in spirit I sometimes wish myself over with you..., especially when occasionally I sit fatigued in the evening twilight at the window of my little room, my eyes turn toward Europe and my spirit..." (The rest of this letter is missing.)

I have quoted from this material at length, not only to convey an impression of what manner of man my grandfather was, but because his move to the Evangelical Association was an important step in our family history. For it was in this church that he became acquainted with my grandmother, and much later it was also in this church that my father met my mother, Ida Parman, who came to Madison from her farm home near Mazomanie to attend the university. My grandmother's maiden name was Elizabeth Kuntz. She was born of Swiss parents, who

had come over in the late 1840's, on a farm near St. Kilian, south of Fond du Lac, and she came to Madison to stay with her relatives the Kentzlers, who had changed their name from Kuntz, and who were in the livery business on East Doty Street. My grandfather and grandmother were married at her parents' home on November 6, 1870. He was then 31 years old, and she was 21.

Their marriage was blessed with eleven children. Emil, my father, was the first, and arrived in September, 1871. Then came Adolph in '73, Bertha in '75, Walter Arthur in '77, who died the following year, another Arthur in '79, Irving in '81, Lillian in '83, Hilton in '85, who died in '87 in a diphtheria epidemic which also carried off other children in the neighborhood and nearly took six year old Irving, who was left weakened by it throughout his life, Alice, who was born in '88, and a pair of twins, Edmund and Edna, in '91. Edmund died in 1895, and so there were eight of the eleven who grew to maturity. Of these, Adolph, the second oldest, was the least integrated in the family. He lived in Chicago for the most part after he grew up, served in the Philippines during the Spanish-American war, and died in 1917. It was the other three brothers and four sisters who eventually came to be the owners of the Frautschi business.

Back at the early beginning, there were changes in location. In October, 1871, shortly after my father was born, my grandfather moved the business from the place at 34 Webster Street to the corner of East Washington Avenue and <sup>North</sup> Webster. He rented a store building there, including living quarters and a barn,

for \$180 per year. This was on a three year lease, but subject to earlier sale by the owner, and it must have been sold, because in September, 1873, Grandoa purchased for \$2,800 a building at 204 King Street, to which he moved his small family on January 8, 1874, and in which he lived and worked for the rest of his life. It was a three story stone structure about 21 feet wide, and the property extended 73 feet to the rear. The store was on the first floor, with an entrance in the middle <sup>of the narrow front</sup> and small show windows on either side; the living quarters were on the second floor, with three tall windows facing out on King Street, and additional rooms with similar windows on the third floor. As I walk on my daily errands up and down King Street, I often glance up at those windows and in imagination think of small Frautschi faces peering down on the scene below. It would have been a busy scene, for this was the oldest and one of the most built-up parts of Madison. Next door down the street was the stone hotel building that still stands there, and across from that the Breckheimer Brewery, with its saloon and the family living quarters upstairs. There were saloons in all directions, and across the street, just around the corner on Doty, was the Fess Hotel, and just beyond that the Kentzler livery stable.

The building which my grandfather purchased was a peculiar one, really only half a building. His ownership extended to the middle of the stairway which led to the second floor, and from there the building continued <sup>under other ownership</sup> around the wide-angled corner and up Webster Street. The first floor of this other part was occupied by the Herfurth general store and later by the

Schlotthauer saloon, and these families and others shared the common stairway to their living quarters on the second and third floors. In 1893 my grandfather built a two story brick addition some 20' wide by 65' long at the rear of his store at a cost of \$1,854, making still stranger the complexities of a complicated building. The land on which the addition was built did not belong to him, and the arrangement was that in lieu of rent the ownership of the addition would pass to the owner of the land after a period of twenty years. For the time being, however, and as it turned out, for the entire time that the family continued to own the building at 204 King Street, this addition gave much needed space for display and warehouse use.

Grandpa became a citizen of the United States in 1884. Aunt Bertha, now in her 94th year, tells me that he was a very serious man, but kind. I asked her what life was like in the old home <sup>above the store,</sup> and as one might expect from what I have already said, religious devotions are prominent in her recollections. The morning started out with prayers and reading from the bible, and the children were often asked to do the reading. Much was made of Christmas, Aunt Bertha recalls. In the morning each child received a bowl of candy; in the afternoon they went to the church to help decorate the great tree there, and the church program was always held on Christmas night. The Frautschi household was a friendly and hospitable one, and my grandmother was known for laughter and a cheerful outlook, and for her great vitality. She was an erect, rather spare, but striking looking person, and I often heard stories of the earlier years when, after all of the household work was done, she dressed



herself up and wheeled her latest child in a baby buggy to the far ends of the city on visits to friends. Aunt Bertha remembers one time during a church conference that there were twenty people seated at table in the Frautschi home, and on the third floor there was a guest bedroom always ready.

Meanwhile the children were growing up. My father went to work for the Northwestern Railroad; he and Mother were married in 1900 and established a home of their own in the four hundred block on East Washington Avenue. Arthur, who was careful in his dress and somewhat debonair in appearance and manner, decided to follow his father in the undertaking business, and the firm became C. Frautschi and Son. Uncle Art became one of the first licensed embalmers and funeral directors in the state of Wisconsin. The older girls finished high school and made visits to their cousins in St. Paul, and in 1903 Uncle Irv went west, where he secured a job with Frederick and Nelson, a large furniture store in Seattle. In later years the two youngest daughters, my Aunts Alice and Edna, had the benefits of higher education, graduating respectively from Stout Institute and the university in Madison.

The year 1905 was an eventful one, and another turning point in the family history. At last it was possible for my grandfather and his brother Jacob from St. Paul to go on a visit to Switzerland, with their wives and one of Uncle Jacob's daughters. On April 12 Uncle Irv arrived home from Seattle so that he could take charge of the store, and on April 25 the travelers left Madison on their long anticipated journey. They made a real vacation and grand tour of it. Grandma proved not to be a very good sailor, but Grandpa evidently

enjoyed the sea. They landed in Southampton and proceeded to London, then crossed the channel to Antwerp and journeyed to Berlin, which Grandpa had heard described as the most beautiful city in the world, and he thought that it lived up to this reputation. Their six weeks in Switzerland were spent partly in travel, and they saw many of the great scenic attractions, journeying as far as Milan in northern Italy. In Geneva they visited the descendants of that Uncle Isaac Frautschi from whom Grandpa had received his first training. Then they went on to Lausanne, to Bern, to Zweisimmen, and finally by post to Saanen, where they reached the home of their brother Gottlieb in Turbachtal on the 26th of May. For three weeks and four days they enjoyed the hospitality of Gottlieb and his wife and of their sister-in-law Katherine, the widow of John, who had died in 1889. There were nephews and nieces and other relatives to visit, some of them already in the huts up on the higher slopes where the cattle were taken in summer, and there were happy days of climbing to these locations, where the noon meal was followed by singing and yodeling and talk, and the enjoyment of lordly views in all directions. In and around the houses on the lower slopes Grandpa found trees that he had helped to plant, and furniture and windows and fences that he had built. He walked long distances to see familiar places and visit old acquaintances, and attended services in the old family church. All too soon it was time to go, and on June 20 the visitors left Saanen, "our old, unforgettable Heimat", never to see it again. They entrained for Montreaux, and went on to Paris, where Grandpa's only comment about the city in which he had spent three very difficult years was that

"we wandered for three-quarters of a day through the streets... and saw much worldly magnificence". They arrived back in Madison on the evening of July 3, and found that everyone was well and everything was in good order after their ten weeks' absence.

My grandfather's statement of assets and liabilities for 1905 showed real estate valued at \$9,450, and inventory, accounts receivable, and other personal property including household goods plus cash on hand totaling \$7,901, or combined assets of \$17,351, against which he listed indebtedness of \$1,093, for a net worth of \$16,257. He also recorded salary payments or drawings taken by Uncle Art, the funeral director, in the amount of \$713 for the year, plus the value of his room and board, and for Uncle Irv \$360 plus room and board. Total receipts for the year were \$9,370, and family expenses were listed as \$1,577.

I cite these figures partly to put the European trip of 1905 in its financial perspective and to emphasize what that journey must have meant to my grandfather as a major event in his life, and partly to record the level of material achievement, aside from what it meant to have fed and clothed and raised a large family, which he had reached in this year of change in the family's affairs. The business now became C. Frautschi and Sons, and new thinking and initiative began to be apparent. In 1906 a new store front was installed at a cost of about \$850, moving the store entrance to one side and providing a larger show window. A much greater step came in 1908 with the purchase of the Waltzinger property just below the Breckheimer Brewery across the street, with

50 feet of frontage on King Street and 44 feet on East Wilson Street. Financing was arranged through the State Bank, and plans for major expansion were under way.

The first stage was the construction in 1909 and 1910 of a funeral home facing Wilson Street on the southern portion of the Waltzinger property. Prior to its completion Uncle Art carried on the funeral business in a building across the street from the old furniture store, in what is now the rear part of the Badger Furniture Store. The new funeral parlors were very advanced for their time, and included a front office, a long parlor or living room with fireplace, a showroom where caskets were displayed one above the other in glass cases along the side walls, a well equipped morgue, and a bedroom and bath for the use of my two uncles. Upstairs on the second and third floors were four flats to provide income and help carry the investment. The first floor of this building is where we now have our drapery studio, office furniture, and carpet departments, and the third floor, with a connection through to the main store, has been used since 1948 for the display of dining room furniture. One of the flats on the second floor contains our drapery workroom, but we still have a tenant in the other one.

Stage two of the expansion program was to be the construction of a new furniture store on the King Street end of the Waltzinger property, with the two buildings standing back to back. In preparation for this the old store building at 204 King Street was sold in August, 1911 to the Fauerbach Brewing Company for \$10,000, and then leased back for continued use as a store and dwelling for two years at \$900 per annum, to

give time for the construction of the new building. Architect Ferd L. Kronenberg, who had designed the funeral building, was engaged to draw plans for a four story structure, later reduced to three stories, with steel frame, brick walls, and wood floors and trim. To save cost, the final specifications incorporated several substitutions, including wood posts and girders instead of iron, except across the main front, yellow pine trim instead of oak, and other less expensive materials.

These developments were still in the planning stage, however, when my grandfather became ill, and he died on January 8, 1912, in his 73rd year. He was deeply mourned, but the veneration which his children had for him did not diminish their resolve to go ahead with the plans for the new store, although of course there were delays. Grandpa had drawn a will in 1909, following the purchase of the Waltzinger property, in which he expressly stated that in the event of his death he wished his furniture and undertaking business to be continued by his widow throughout her lifetime, if she should survive him, and in any case it should be continued for a period of at least 18 years from the date of the will, before the estate would be divided among his sons and daughters. My father Emil, who was the oldest and with whom my grandfather had always had a close relationship of trust and affection, was named by him executor of the will and trustee of the estate for the period pending its final settlement and distribution. At the time that the will was written my father was manager of the Wisconsin Telephone Company in Madison, but in <sup>at same year, 1909,</sup> ~~1912~~ he left this position to become manager of the Madison

Fuel Company, which he and three other men purchased in that year. In this way it came about that while his full time work was in the fuel business, as trustee he was also the responsible head of C. Frautschi and Sons from 1912 until the incorporation of the business in 1927, and thereafter he served as its president until his death in the summer of 1959. He never worked actively in the furniture store or funeral home, but he visited them almost every day, gave their affairs a great deal of his time and attention, and possibly identified himself in his own thinking more with the family enterprise than he did with his own personal company, even after he bought the shares of his remaining partners in 1936.

In February, 1913 the necessary court orders were issued to authorize refinancing and the construction of the new store building at 219 King Street, the main part of our present store. The mortgage was increased from \$14,000 to \$35,000, and the building contract was let for \$23,871. Meanwhile a house had been purchased in the 600 block on East Gorham Street, and my grandmother and those of her family who were still at home moved out of the old store building on King Street. The new store was ready by ~~late~~ autumn in 1913, and was proudly opened to the Madison public. Initially there were only two floors for furniture display, the street level and the high ceilinged second floor, where there were model rooms along the east wall. The office was on the balcony, as well as a gift shop, which was in charge of Aunt Bertha, whose duties also included the advertising program for the store. The basement was a warehouse, and goods were received down a steel chute through the front sidewalk, at the base of

which was a baling machine to take care of the great quantities of excelsior and paper, and the boiler was wood as well as coal burning, to use up the crating. The elevator was controlled with ropes, but was reliable, and the third floor was used for more warehouse space and for the repair shop.

The business judgment that had entered into these developments was good, and the following years showed steady growth in sales volume and in the relative well being of the members of the family. Uncle Arthur was married, as were also my Aunts Lillian, Edna, and Alice, and the latter two went to live in Virginia. The house on East Gorham Street continued to be a center of family life, however, and I remember it as a comfortable, cheery home, with lively family gatherings at Christmas and other times. Grandma Frautschi grew older with dignity, an abiding interest in the affairs of her sons and daughters and grandchildren, and continuing devotion to the Evangelical Church. Uncle Irv, after the strenuous years of the previous decade, which must have been exhilarating years for him, had a prolonged period of illness following the war and into the early nineteen twenties, which took him at different times to Battle Creek, Michigan, and to sanatoria in northern Wisconsin and in the southwest, while the store was operated by an assistant manager. From this he made a good recovery, and in 1923 he was married and established a comfortable and happy home of his own.

The furniture and undertaking establishments were both doing well. A motor hearse was purchased in 1915, and in the flu epidemic of 1918 and 1919 the facilities and the strength of my two uncles and their men were tested almost beyond

endurance. The growth of the furniture business also was steady and continuous. To release more space for display in the store building, a brick warehouse was built on the Illinois Central tracks near West Doty Street, across from the Madison Fuel Company. A setback came in the recession year of 1921, when the company found itself with an inventory replaceable at substantially lower prices in the post-war adjustment, but from 1913 to 1925 the cash receipts of the business as a whole, not counting rents, grew from \$49,000 to \$266,000. The firm enjoyed good ratings and showed a marked increase in net worth, and it was in this setting of rapid growth and accomplishment<sup>ment</sup> that the next major expansion occurred.

The old Breckheimer Brewery had been forced to end operations when prohibition came, and had closed. In 1921, in spite of the financial stringencies of that year, my father, acting for the C. Frautschi Estate, purchased the brewery property for \$55,000, thus much more than doubling the land area held in that block. The buildings directly adjoined the furniture store and funeral home, with a two story brick and stone structure on King Street, where the saloon and Breckheimer family living quarters had been located, the brewing facilities behind that, and the brick ice houses with the beer cellar which I described earlier in this account deep underground, running back to Wilson Street. There were also wagon sheds and other installations, and an alley, complete with iron rings for the tying of horses, running all of the way through the block. The frontage on King Street was 57 feet, and on East Wilson Street 132 feet.



Immediately after this purchase the furniture store advertised a clearance sale with a 25% price reduction on every item of merchandise, this being the first sale held since the opening of the new store eight years before. The newspaper announcement stated that the acquisition of the brewery property had come unexpectedly, and that the purpose of the sale was to reduce stock on hand for the proposed remodeling period and to empty the warehouse on West Doty Street, which was to be sold. Unstated reasons undoubtedly were to raise cash for the purchase, and to move out furniture which was now replaceable at lower prices. The remodeling was a gradual process, but openings were made in the walls to connect the properties, floors were built into the ice houses to convert them for warehouse use, and the repair shop was moved from its old location on the third floor to a much more convenient place near our loading entrance on the alley. The old saloon and its basement on King Street were leased to the Anderson Light and Sales Company which operated a store there for the next five years, following which this space, too, was incorporated into the furniture store.

Grandma Frautschi died in 1926, just short of the eighteen year period from the date of his will which Grandma had specified for the continuation of his business as an entity before any distribution should be made to the heirs. Now it was necessary to make a settlement, and the three brothers and four sisters decided that the business should be incorporated and each should take equal shares in it as their portion of the estate. On June 24, 1927, C. Frautschi and Sons became Frautschi's, Inc.,

with 224 shares of no par value stock outstanding, and each of the seven heirs received 32 shares. All seven were made members of the board of directors, and my father was elected president, Uncle Irv became vice-president and continued as manager of the furniture store, Uncle Art was made treasurer and manager of the funeral home, and Aunt Bertha was secretary.

In his report to the directors in March, 1928, Uncle Irv said that the experiences of the past few years had shown very clearly that something should be done about the funeral home. He suggested that thought be given to the building of a new modern funeral home on East Wilson Street, where the Breckheimer wagon sheds had stood. This step was decided on, plans were drawn by the architectural firm of Law, Law, and Potter, and the building which is now our downtown funeral home was erected and completed in 1929. Twenty years of experience in the older structure had proved invaluable, and the facilities were so well thought out and arranged that when we planned the funeral home which we opened on Speedway Road in 1961 we used essentially the same floor plan, only reversing it from left to right, and enlarging the areas somewhat. The 1929 building is an attractive red brick structure with three stories, the upper two containing sixteen rental apartment units.

We have arrived back at the point where I began, at the time of my decision to go to work at the furniture store. My timing was extraordinary, for it coincided with the beginning of the depression, and my first decade there was a period of great difficulty, followed by a second decade of abnormal wartime operation and post-war recovery. For me there was

never the illusion of instant success, and I felt that I was fortunate that I had not started several years earlier, with possibly a quite different outlook and set of values to overcome. As the depression deepened I was only partially aware of the strains placed upon my father and on Uncles Art and Irv, who had always given their personal guarantees for the indebtedness of the company, but who now were forced to take many other uncomfortable measures, and to subordinate their personal loans to the firm to those owing the bank. I was aware, of course, that salaries were low, and were nevertheless cut, and from examining the record I know that Uncle Irv took by far the greatest cut of all. Our factory suppliers were offering furniture at prices which to me seemed normal, since I was new, but we had older stock on hand on which the costs seemed extravagantly high, and the percentage of markdowns was savage. Collections were difficult, but at first I had little to do with that. Uncle Irv supervised this function, and many promissory notes were accepted and extensions granted, and of course the write-offs were substantial. Dollar sales sank, and it was several years before they again reached the levels of the nineteen twenties. Of the ten years from 1931 through 1940, five resulted in losses which greatly exceeded the profits of the other five, and dividends and directors' fees paid starting in 1936 exceeded in amount the gain of the five profitable years. The result was that the net worth of the company at the outbreak of World War II was substantially less than at the time of incorporation in 1927.

Uncle Irv, who was never robust after his childhood illness, had been in reasonably good health following the period just prior to his marriage, but he became seriously ill in 1941, and died on November 7, just one month before Pearl Harbor. He was 60 years old. I always liked him, and he apparently had confidence in me; I cannot remember a single moment of friction between us. As an employer he was indulgent and permissive as far as I was concerned, and generous with everyone within the circumstances that prevailed. He had long since given me full rein with respect to buying and merchandising, and of necessity I assumed most of the other functions of management during the year before he died. In recognition of this, I was elected to take his place as a director and vice-president, and was given two shares of stock as extra compensation for that trying year. Thus the original balance of seven equal owners was changed for the first time, and I became a stockholder. In <sup>1947</sup>~~1946~~ a stock purchase arrangement was devised for me, and I am now the largest stockholder. Of the original seven stockholders only Aunt Bertha and Aunt Edna, who is Mrs. Walter E. Schmidt and lives in Evanston, Illinois, are still living, as are also Mrs. Irving Frautschi and Mrs. Arthur Frautschi, the widows of my two uncles. There are twelve stockholders now, all of them members of the family.

The war years were entirely different from the preceding decade. After price and wage controls were established there was stability in these respects, generally speaking, but the record keeping requirements of both regulations were burdensome in the extreme. The scarcity of merchandise and the rise in

employment helped to stimulate sales, and we discontinued our semi-annual clearance events. Many furniture factories changed over partially or totally to war production, and those still supplying the trade often did so on a quota basis. Part of my job was to seek out sources of merchandise, and I found myself traveling to factories or making extra trips to markets in this pursuit. Most factories that we dealt with maintained their quality standards, except for substitutions required by law, such as the requirement that no metal springs be used in mattresses or upholstered furniture. Personnel problems were critical, because younger men were leaving for service, and others left to take higher paying jobs in factories. Thus we were forced into economies, while averaging a better return on sales even under price control, because there were fewer markdowns, and the business began to be more profitable. Also our accounts receivable were paid off far more rapidly, and as they were reduced and our inventory dropped, we were able to eliminate our bank borrowing and to make substantial payments on our mortgage.

Uncle Art died in October, 1945, and at this time I was given full responsibility for the entire business. Fortunately my uncle's assistant, John H. Schantz, had been with him since 1932, and he was fully capable of taking over the direction of the funeral home. He and an experienced staff have carried on this part of our business efficiently and with good judgment, but without the professional participation of any member of our family.

During World War II it was widely expected that there would be a post-war recession, comparable to that of a

generation earlier, but it failed to materialize. Instead, controls were removed only gradually as buying demand increased, and our volume of business rose to new levels. This encouraged us to make a number of improvements in the furniture store, including a number of remodeling projects and the opening of our Grand Rapids Guild Galleries, where we presented a coordinated program of furniture, carpets, lamps, accessories, fabrics, custom made draperies, wallpapers, and even paints. We opened larger archways connecting the rooms on our main floor, and built a direct access stairway to the basement, which had previously been lacking.

Madison was growing, and thanks principally to the influence of the automobile, was changing rapidly in other respects. As residential areas were developed farther and farther out, stores and shopping facilities appeared on the outskirts, and we began to have new competition from outlying furniture stores. Downtown as a shopping center became less convenient, but our situation did not seem to warrant opening a second store or moving to a new location. We proceeded on the assumption that we could continue to draw trade downtown on the basis of quality merchandise and service, and these we endeavored in all ways to improve. It did seem important to do something about parking, and in 1951 we purchased an old frame house which stood alongside our property on Wilson Street. We removed the house and thus gained a small parking lot which accommodates several cars. At the rear of this lot we remodeled an old shed which had covered the area between our buildings and made it into an attractive entrance way and display space which we call <sup>the</sup> ~~our~~ Garden Room.

Meanwhile some of our employees were approaching an age when they would be thinking of retiring. Mr. Geiger, the Swiss cabinetmaker, had already left in 1936 after 23 years of service, and Aunt Bertha retired in 1939. After the war it seemed desirable to make provision for such occurrences in the future, and in 1946 we adopted a profit sharing plan in which all employees except the managers of the furniture store and the funeral service accumulate funds after three years of service, to be paid to them as retirement benefits when they leave. The fund has prospered from the company's contributions each year and from its own earnings and the appreciation of investments, and <sup>as Trustee</sup> I have been glad to be able to make the payments to which our longtime employees were entitled after retirement, especially in such notable cases as L. L. North, who managed our office furniture department for 27 years, C. J. Cunningham and Paul Rose, who were furniture salesmen for 36 and 38 years respectively, Mrs. Mary Meyers, our cleaning woman in the store for 17 years, Miss Minnie Geiger, daughter of the cabinetmaker, who worked in our office for over 47 years until her retirement in 1961, and Walter Smyth, who spent nearly 43 years in our warehouse and delivery service. The assets of the fund are now over \$200,000, and twenty-two present employees qualify as participants, with varying amounts to their credit depending on length of service and other factors set forth in the trust agreement.

During the present decade the furniture store has increased its volume, due in large part I think to our interior decorating

service. We first entered this field when Miss Elaine Eschweiler persuaded us to employ her in 1934, and we already had our own drapery workroom for several years before World War II. Miss Eschweiler left in 1944, but we have always employed one or more women as decorators since we started with her. Since 1960 we have emphasized this aspect of our business much more than formerly, and have again operated a drapery workroom of our own. At present we have a staff of four busy decorators who sell substantial amounts of furniture as well as draperies, fabrics for reupholstering, wallpaper, carpets, and accessories, and our salesmen are also well qualified through long years of experience on our staff to give competent service.

The operation of the funeral service has brought quite different problems and solutions. Here we recognized in the early nineteen fifties that if we wished to maintain our leadership in the community, and indeed, to exist at all in the sense of maintaining an interested and capable staff, we would have to plan for growth and look for a new location. My father and my aunts, who were getting along beyond the years when one would expect them to be interested in new ventures, agreed, and I was impressed by their willingness to take smaller returns from the business in order to strengthen our position. In 1954 we purchased from the Resurrection Cemetery the vacant land along Speedway Road which had been separated from the rest of the cemetery by Hillcrest Drive. Its location between the Catholic and Forest Hill cemeteries seemed to us to be ideal for our purposes as well as those of the public, and we were encouraged by professional planners



and officials in City Hall to think that this was so. However, our attempt to have the property rezoned as Commercial B, which was required before we could build a funeral home there, was defeated in 1954 because of the opposition of neighbors living to the west of the property. This was a jolting experience, but we were convinced that the merits were on our side, and we made a second try in 1958. This time, in spite of even more strenuous opposition, the Plan Commission and the City Council approved the rezoning, and we engaged the firm of Weiler and Strang to design the building. Financing was arranged for and contracts were signed, but the day that construction was to begin in 1959, some of the neighbors who had opposed us secured a court order enjoining us from proceeding. Again we decided to try to see it through, however little we relished the situation, and the case came to trial in January, 1960. The verdict was favorable and at last we were free to go ahead.

In accordance with assurances which we had given both before and during the trial, we did our best to make the funeral home an attractive place both inside and out. It was completed and first used in midsummer, 1961, and is now the principal location for our funeral service. There are still enough families who prefer the use of the downtown funeral home, however, to warrant continued use of that facility as well. On January 1, 1967, the funeral service became a separate corporation, wholly owned by Freutschi's Inc., with the same board of directors and officers as the parent company. This has improved our operation in a variety of ways, and we believe

today  
that we are better staffed and better equipped than ever to render the service which my grandfather started when he opened his Saerg and Schreiner Geschäft just one hundred years ago.

It seems appropriate to close with a summing up of my personal experience of nearly 40 years as an employee of this family enterprise. They have been confining years. A merchant's work is never done, and although there are seasonal variations and differences, every month is important, as is every week, and six days of every week. One cannot close up shop to get away. The business is not large enough for me to avoid involvement in routine tasks, but it is large enough to have an abundance of problems, a great share of which come my way for solution. But there are many satisfactions, and even the problems can be interesting and often challenging. For one thing, furniture is a pleasing commodity. Its design and fabrication are recognized arts, as is also the creation of fine interiors. Our relationships with our suppliers and with our customers are usually cordial and gratifying. As for our employees, over the years they have been an uncommonly stable and loyal group, many of whom have made a life work of working for Frautschi's, and almost invariably my personal relationships with them have seemed to me to be good. As for my employers, all of whom have also been my relatives, I seem to have held their confidence, and a situation which could easily have been marked by friction has been almost totally free of it as far as I have been aware. For me and my own immediate family, the business has provided a livelihood and means of

support. And beyond all of that, it has provided a base from which I could play a part in the life of the community where I was born - in Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin, which for me is the beloved Heimatland.