

The Hans Hitz Branch
International Hitz Convention, July 16-18, 2004
June Vail

Landamann Hans Hitz 1772-1840 (Image #1)
From "The Swiss Family Hitz", manuscript by Dorothy Abbott

"The former Landamann Hitz, in the year 1834 moved with his family to Washington D.C. where a friend of his from Davos, Mr. Paul Kindschi (Kinchy) had already been settled ... as a candy-maker of good reputation, and had earned a nice fortune. Here, on an estate of his friend located on the edge of the city, on a hill, the still sturdy [former] Landamann founded the first somewhat sizable dairy farm in this part of the country following the Swiss pattern. There were spacious barns for holding 80-100 cows from which milk was shipped to town, in huge, brightly polished wooden buckets, twice a day in a one horse cart. During that time the inhabitants heard with admiration the sound of the "pipes" when the well-kept cattle, headed by the leading cow, came up and down the "Hill" as the estate was called, to the pasture. The Americans were just as surprised by the equipment of the "liquid manure" cart which naturally was not missing and which the virgin but poor soil of that area needed so much."

Christina Brosi Hitz 1774 – 1838 (Images #2,#3)

Christina Brosi Hitz had 10 children, of whom 6 died in infancy. She died 7 years after the family's arrival in America, at age 64. Her children surviving to adulthood: Magdalene (m. Paul Kinchy), Christina (m. Florian Hitz), Elspeth (m. Christian Wetzel), and Hans (Johannes) (m. Anna Kohler)

Hans (Johannes) Hitz 1797-1864 (Image #4)
From an original undated document in German loaned by Thomas Hew of Klosters to Harold H. Burton, August 1953, translated 1955.

"... When Civil War broke out, John Hitz openly expressed his sympathy for the Union cause. He was personally held in friendly relations with then Secretary of State William Seward, resulting in a noticeable sympathy by Americans for Switzerland. Although it was contradictory to the etiquette prevailing in Washington Mr. John Hitz was socially as well as officially given equal rank with full-fledged diplomats. Mr. Hitz was able to secure an exceptional position for the Swiss through his dealings with the American authorities, but his primary merit was to have manifested a tireless sense of sacrifice on behalf of his fellow countrymen, which rarely finds an equal. However insignificant a matter, unjustified a request, or difficult an order might have been, this man took it up with affectionate devotion and friendly good will. [For example, the problems with pensions for soldiers, or support for surviving family.]...

“This conscientious representative who frequently could still be seen working in his office at midnight actually died from over-exertion at the age of 67 on January 27, 1864.”

(President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of State Seward, and many others in the highest ranks of government and the diplomatic corps attended his funeral.)

“But with his physical death the charitable activity of this noble man was by no means to have an end. Although he had already promoted the foundation of the Washington Grütli Association in 1859, among the dispositions in his will was found a bequest of 5000 Swiss Francs for the purpose of encouraging the establishment of a Swiss Welfare Association; the sum of 10,000 francs each was assigned to the communities of Davos and Klosters, with one-half the amount intended as a contribution to the welfare fund (of these communities) and the other half for school purposes...children’s annual festivals to be offered with plays, musicals and other entertainment –“which are the best means to further patriotism and to perpetuate [feeling for] the institutions of the country”.

An additional 5000 Swiss Francs were intended as compensation to creditors who had supported his father in his [failed] mining activities...”

Anna Kohler Hitz 1796-1883 (Images #5, #6,#7,#8,#9)

***Obituary from The Evening Star, Washington, D.C. March 6, 1883
The Death of “Mother Hitz”
Interesting Reminiscences of the Hitz Family***

“... In early life...she was a noted village belle, beloved by all for her gentleness and exemplary character. Of her numerous suitors she accepted and was married, December 3, 1820, to the son of her employer, the most prominent man of the locality and then largely engaged in mining operations...The public and self-sacrificing spirit of her father-in-law brought upon the family well nigh financial ruin and determined him and the son in the year 1831 to seek in America a wider and more remunerative field of activity for their energies and enterprise.

Excerpted from Ancestor-Descendant, by Ursula Lehmann-Gugolz, 1998, suggested by Christine Mohandie-Phillips:

Comments among those in Klosters at the time of Hans Hitz’ death:
“ ‘Anneli Kohler from Selfranga...Whoever would have thought that she would one day travel in the highest circles in America.’ ...’That just goes to prove that when you learn service in a noble city house, you yourself can learn to behave like noble ladies and gentlemen’ “.

Again, from Obituary, Evening Star:

“Civil war had ...set in, and among the first women found busy visiting the camps was Mrs. Ann Hitz, who seemed tireless in affording relief and giving comfort to the suffering. She...so endeared herself to soldiers and others as to receive on all hands the appellation of “Mother Hitz”...Her labors of love did not cease with the war, however, but the sick and distressed, the forlorn and the poor never appealed to her in vain...”

Anna Kohler Hitz had 16 children, of whom 5 survived: Christine (m. Casparis), d. 1859; Margaret (m. Jacob Scheitlin) d. 1894; George (all children died) d. 1893; Rudolph (m. Mary Barnard) d. 1869; John Jr (m. Jane Catherine Shanks) d. 1908.

John Hitz (Junior) 1828-1908 (Image #10, #11, #12)

From 1886 court documents, Jane C. Hitz vs. William P. Jenks in the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia (summarized by great-grandson John R Hitz 1995):

“The most positive evaluation of John Hitz [as a banker/businessman] comes in the testimony of William G. Metzertott, an old friend and business associate:

Q. (E. Totten, Jane Hitz’s lawyer): Mr. Metzertott, was not the reason of your condemnation of this savings and national bank enterprise the fact of Mr. Hitz’s unfitness for the management of such a concern?

A. (W.G. Metzertott): Well, I can answer that question in this way: I have known Mr. Hitz for many years; we have been brothers almost. (Pausing).

Q. (E. Totten): Well, speak it out, Mr. Metzertott.

A. (W.G. Metzertott): One moment...[LONG PAUSE] he is too much of a philanthropist for a bank president. (p.461).”

From “John Hitz as I Knew Him”, by Helen Keller:

“I liked best to ramble with him through the woods...He described the trees and flowers...until they seemed a tangible part of my experience. To the last he retained a vitality that made him young with the young. He said I never seemed deaf or blind to him, and I could not think of him as old. His spirit was so gracious and happy it radiated grace and happiness to others. He had more than his share of sorrow and disillusionment. Yet his faith in human goodness never wavered...To women he brought a special message; for he was in sympathy with all sane work for their advancement. It was his unceasing effort to foster in us a larger activity...He disapproved our shrinking from independent, fearless thought and reflection. He exhorted us to think that we might develop a greater capacity for usefulness...It was Mr. Hitz who introduced me to the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg ..The spirit realm of which he gave me many beautiful and definite ideas, seemed close, real to him. The hereafter...was a present, eternal, joyous inspiring world that shed its glory upon material surroundings...I cannot feel he is dead now.”

Jane Catherine Shanks Hitz 1838-1909 (Image #13)

Summary by John R. Hitz (1995) From records of the court cases brought by Jane Hitz against her husband John Hitz:

“Jane Hitz’s testimony shows she had little faith in her husband’s management of her property, which he continually mortgaged and lost. In the end, she became estranged from him and forced him to sign over everything that had not already been liquidated. She was opposed to his involvement in the German American Savings Bank, later the German-American National Bank, knowing his lack of business acumen.

“Jane Hitz is described in the testimony as an intelligent and independent woman, active in various socially progressive organizations: Washington Training School for Servants (treasurer), the Labor Exchange (to help unemployed workers) Superintendent, Training School for Nurses, later Columbian Medical School (Board of Trustees), one of the first to admit women -- in 1881, later George Washington University School of Medicine...”

William Henry Hitz 1872 – 1935 (Images #14, #15)

Letter from Gertrude Hitz Burton to her brother, sent the day she died, January 26, 1896: (written by Helen K Spofford, the children’s’ nurse and GHB’s trusted companion):

My Dear Mr. Hitz

“...As soon as the doctor made known to Mrs. Burton that she might have but a short time to live, she made arrangements for an interview between you and Mr. Davidge, who could satisfactorily explain to you her father’s position in the failure of the banks and the complications which followed...

Your sister feels that she is not leaving this life quite loyally unless she does her utmost to secure to you a presentation of the facts, which she feels unequal to doing herself, and so now when nothing can affect your future relations with your sister, she requests you to ask Mr. Davidge for an interview at his office or residence. Believe me”

Son and father did reconcile, and saw each other often in the last few years of John Hitz’ life: Entry from John Hitz’ diary Feb 4, 1908, just before his death):

“Called in to see my son William H. at his office who was suffering from La Grippe but received me very cordially and in the course of conversation, on my saying I would if I had the funds spend my vacation in Europe rejoined that should not hinder me – he would arrange that – which was a most agreeable surprise to me and which gave me new vigor and much delight.”

From Susan Hitz Scholl:

“One quote is attributed to Judge William Hitz: Upon finding out that a married couple was cohabitating just prior to their divorce (which would have violated a separation agreement), he said, ‘This court cannot tolerate the obvious contempt you have shown for the law created by your willingness to litigate by day and fornicate by night’.”

Gertrude Hitz Burton 1861-1896 (Images #16, #17, #18, #19)

Letter written to Arnold and Harold December 1895, probably Christmas Eve. They were staying in Leysin near her sanitorium during the holidays:

“To My Boys!
My precious boys,

It is sweet to me to have a little glimpse of your room and to see where you sleep all the long quiet night. I would like to cover all the walls with my love and leave beautiful and loving messages everywhere to whisper in your ears when you least expect them. I would like to pack your pillows full of the most beautiful and wondrous dreams and to watch over you in the still night-time and to fill your hearts full of good things for all the hours of the day. I would like to kiss your eyes open in the morning and always to sleep with you in some sort of tremendous bed that nobody ever heard of! And I would like to do a thousand things more, “SUPPOSING” that I could, but most of all I would like you to feel me near you always and to help you like a sweet voice in your hearts always whispering ‘Remember!’ ‘Be good! Be good! Make others happy! ...’”

GHB obituary from The School Bulletin, New York Educational Journal, May 1896:

“Many who attended the meeting of the National Educational Association at Chautauqua in 1880 will remember a singularly charming young woman in garb of Quaker gray and cut, who attracted marked attention....We found her to be the daughter of John Hitz then the Swiss Consul-General at Washington, and though herself not a teacher, interested in her father’s philanthropic and educational work. She proved to be an exceedingly delightful companion. To a child’s capacity for absolute enjoyment she united a keen perception, a quick sense of the humorous, ready sympathy and remarkable grace of expression. We met her afterwards from time to time. She became interested in the education of girls for pure and healthful womanhood, and in 1884 published a book on this subject that received wide attention...when we saw her last two little sons were playing about her knees; but she told us then with a cheerful acceptance of facts that did not have even the accent of resignation, that her life would be short; and as we parted, her last words were ‘Don’t forget me’, as though one could forget her, who had once come under the influence of her presence ...she lifted our conceptions of the possibilities of sweet womanhood.”

Felix Arnold Burton 1885-1949 (Images #20, #21)

From the Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine by John V. Goff 1995

“Burton’s artistic interests were already developed by the time he entered college. He finished his undergraduate years as Artist and Art Editor of the Bowdoin Bugle. His senior yearbook published 22 of his sketches of the college and the town. Most were signed by a logo that positioned the word “Felix” around a circular, smiling face. [Felix means “happy” in Latin]...

“...the full extent of his practice [as an architect] may never be known, but it is clear that over fifty works in New England testify to the sophisticated imagination of Felix Arnold Burton, architect.”

Harold Hitz Burton 1888-1964 (Images #22, #23, #24, #25)

Excerpt from Address by Harold Hitz Burton, upon receiving the prestigious Bowdoin Prize, September 1958:

“...it seems like yesterday, rather than fifty years ago, that I won the most important prize of my life. It was...not far from this place that I won the acceptance of my future bride. Ever since then we have undertaken and rendered our public service together. I am glad that my wife is here to share in the award. Likewise, I am glad that our two ...sons are here. I pay tribute to them and to our two daughters for having made many sacrifices in order that my public service might be rendered.”

[The Burton Christmas card, 1953, written by Harold Hitz Burton (photo of the Washington Monument seen from the pillars of the Lincoln Memorial):

“Fundamentals

Washington wrote: “Integrity and firmness is all I can promise.” Upon this combination of virtues he founded our nation’s character. His monument is our symbol of integrity and strength.

Lincoln added “with charity for all”. His love for his fellow man shines from his words and deeds. His spirit lifts the hearts of all who visit his Memorial.

In our families, among our neighbors and toward the world, in all things, large and small, let us too be ever true and ever kind, for Truth and Kindness are the parents of Peace and Good Will.”

Excerpt from letter dated September 22, 1958 (on his retirement), and signed by Chief Justice Earl Warren and the seven other Associate Justices:

“Justice Burton has regarded his position on the Court as a trusteeship, and has dedicated himself to it wholly and without stint. His indefatigable energies and keen analysis have earned the respect of those who serve with him, as his gentle, understanding, and undemanding nature has earned their deep affection and esteem.

“We can say today of Justice Burton what he once wrote in looking back upon the career of Chief Justice Marshall: ‘As a lawyer and a judge he was pre-eminent for his power of analysis. As a private citizen he was beloved for his simplicity of character.’ ”