

# Neitzels of Suisun Valley

By Nancy Dingler

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Now that the Cordelia Truck Scales have been completely eradicated along with the surrounding trees and shrubs, the Percy Neitzel house stands exposed, no longer hidden from view. The Neitzel farm property butts up against the Solano Community college campus.

In the E.I.R. report for the city of Fairfield, who will be deciding the fate of the home: The farm includes seven buildings consisting of a main residence, guest house, foreman's house, garden shed and three garages. The main residence is a handsome two-story Spanish Eclectic-style house. The elegant residence features a concrete perimeter foundation, stucco walls and a cross-gabled roof clad with Mission tiles.

Typical of the Spanish Eclectic-style, the main entrance features and arched door with a dramatically ornate surround. The scalloped surround includes decorate acanthus leaves incised in the stucco. Two projecting single-story wings form a patio that leads to the entryway.

Who built this magnificent structure? Who were the Neitzel's?

The name of Neitzel first became know to the residents of Solano county through the arrival here in 1854 of Frank Egan Neitzels, father of Charles Henry, who was born in Germany, and immigrated to the United States when he was 16 years old. He worked hard, was thrifty and in time was able to purchase his own ranch. Frank married Johanna Higgins, sister of William Higgins of Green Valley.

A biographical profile of Charles Henry Neitzel can be found in the "History of Solano and Napa Counties". Evidently, Charles Henry was the assistant manager of the wholesale commission business of the Stewart Fruit Company, at Suisun during the 1880s and 90s. "Charles Henry was born in November of 1863". There was a brother, William. "Charles received the common school education afforded in Suisun township. His earliest recollections center around his father's ranching enterprise, and a different kind of experience grew out of his apprenticeship to a blacksmith, which trade he subsequently combined with farming. Beginning with his thirty-seventh year he operated the home place in partnership with his brother.

In October of 1901 Charles married Cora Gordon, a native of Shasta County. When the "History of Solano and Napa Counties" was published, there were only two

children noted, daughters; Isabella, born in 1902 and Catherine Louise, born in 1908.

In my interview with Frank Neitzel, Charles Henry's grandson, he stated that the Percy Neitzel home in Cordelia had already been moved three times before. Originally the house stood where Scandia is now. Then it was moved behind the Green Valley School before being moved to it's present site behind Solano Community College.

Frank's father, was Jim (Lewis) Neitzel. Frank's cousin was Percy Maxwell Neitzel. Percy built the house. According to Frank, cousin Percy was an only child and spoiled. In his "flaming" youth he drove a Stutz Bearcat and wore a Raccoon coat, which was all the rage as well as status symbols of the well-to-do in the 1920s. Frank Neitzel said that his father and cousin Percy attended UCD together. Frank's father was nicknamed Jim after the famous fighter, Jim Corbett, but his real name was Lewis. Jim died in 1941, the year Frank was born.

His mother, Vera Horgan was from Berkeley, her father was a jeweler. She remarried, when Frank was five years old, to "Howdy" James Howard Rogers of Vacaville. Frank and his older brother, Joe, were raised on the Neitzel ranch til he was 18, when he entered college. Vera and "Howdy" had another boy, Charles.

Both Neitzel ranches were fruit ranches. Frank does not recall the children being involved in the ranch operation. The families and their kids hung out together. They spent summers swimming in Mangels lake and riding horses at Howdy's ranch. All three boys, Frank, Joe and Charles attended Green Valley school. Joe and Frank went on to Armijo High, while the much younger, Charles, attended Vacaville High. The Lewis Neitzel 55 acre ranch stayed in the family until 1976, when it was sold. The small acreage was no longer profitable. Cousin Percy's ranch remained.

Percy died in January of 1977. "The funeral for Percy Maxwell Neitzel, 76, 292 Suisun Valley Rd., Suisun will be 2 pm Saturday at Bryan-Braker Funeral Home here. Mr. Neitzel died in a Fairfield hospital Wednesday, after a long illness. Born in San Francisco, he was a longtime Solano County resident. He was a well-known local rancher and orchardist, past president of the Solano County Historical Society, trustee of the Rockville Cemetery Dist., member of the Suisun Rotary Club, Green Valley Country Club and a 1925 graduate of University of California. Mr. Neitzel is survived by his wife, Wilmere Neitzel of Suisun."

Wilmere (Jordan) Neitzel, Percy's widow eventually remarried Ernest T. Hansen and the Percy Neitzel ranch became known as Hansen's ranch. Wilmere's grandfather was Frank C. Jordan, a former secretary of state for California and her uncle was Frank M. Jordan, also a former secretary of state. Wilmere taught for many years at the Green Valley School in Cordelia. Wilmere and Percy were married in 1930. They had

no children.

Wilmere posed for a photo and interview with the Daily Republic in April of 1975 dressed in a Revolutionary gown, portraying Betsy Ross. At the time she was president of the Fairfield-Suisun Fine Arts Council. "Relaxed, feminine and attractive, Mrs. Neitzel has managed to fill her time with more constructive and humanitarian activities than most of us could ever think of, even before the current interest in Woman's Liberation. Coming from an old and distinguished Sacramento family, Mrs. Neitzel took her A.B. from the University of California and her M.M. from Sacramento State College.

She taught in the Sacramento Public Schools until 1930, when she married Percy Neitzel and came to Solano County. In 1943, she returned to teaching, in Fairfield, and taught in Green Valley from 1947 to 58.

In 1958 Mrs. Neitzel became an educational consultant at the Solano County Office of Education. She now is retired, but hardly inactive.

The Percy Neitzel home was used by the Intercommunity Hospital Guild as a money raiser. They hosted teas and tours of the historic house.

Wilmere passed away in July of '82. She was a regent of the University of the Pacific in Stockton; co-founder, past president and life member of the Solano County Historical Society; member of the California Heritage Commission Board, board member of the California Historical Society and National Trust for Historic Preservation. Before her death she owned and operated restaurants in Suisun City. With her great interest in local history and historic preservation, I am sure Wilmere would have liked to see the Percy Neitzel home become a permanent part of Solano County and Fairfield's history.

SPECIAL NOTE: I have received responses to requests for photos and family stories. Some of stories are going to require extensive research to verify facts and dates and in some cases, solve mysteries. Please be patient, these things take time.

May 26th thru 30th Vacaville will be celebrating Fiesta Days, which is essentially a recognition of Vacaville's Pioneer roots. There will be a parade on Saturday, the 28th. In among the carnival and celebratory atmosphere, the Vacaville Heritage Council on East Main St. will be hosting visitors. A table will be set-up for the membership/volunteer drive for the Fairfield-Suisun Museum.

Come join to preserve the past for the future.

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