



Witte Hardware Company - Some Historical Highlights Under the "IXL Square Brand"

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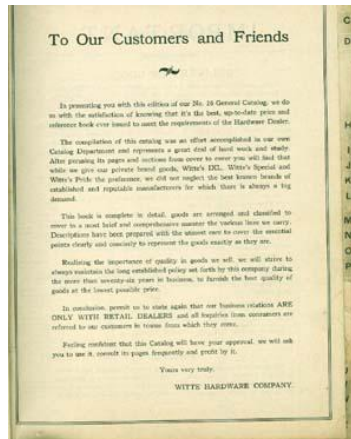


Photo Contributed by Leo Rockenstein

Article Courtesy of Bill Magee, From St. Louis Republic, Sunday July 12, 1908

The evolution of St. Louis into the leading hardware center of the United States within the last half century has been contributed to by the Witte Hardware Company in its proportionate degree since the business of the company was established in 1849, the name at its founding and for many years afterwards being Schmieding and Wulfig. In 1874, the firm name became F.A. Witte and Co. the head of the partnership under that title being the brother of Otto H. Witte, the

president of the Witte Hardware Company, and the father of F.A. Witte, its secretary

Incorporation under the title of the Witte Hardware Company was effected by Mr. Otto H. Witte, December 29, 1880, so that for a quarter of a century the name has been the Witte Hardware Company.

The company originally occupied No. 706 North Third street, but as the business grew and extended, it occupied in conjunction the adjoining building, No. 704 North Third Street and in 1886, the continued expansion of the business obliged it to buy for warehouse purposes Nos. 705 and 707 North Second St.

These two warehouse locations from part of the site of the new big warehouse building, which was completed in December, 1905. This building has a frontage of 175 feet on Second Street between Lucas and Morgan Street and extends back 125 feet to Collins.

A bridge over Collins Street connects the building with the office and sample-room view of the buildings in another part of the building on Third Street.

The new warehouse is a six-story building of brick construction lay with cement and is said to be the strongest building of its kind in St. Louis. Being built expressly for the business of the Witte Company, it is equipped with all the latest improvements to facilitate the handling of hardware in the proper manner, thus assuring to their customers quick shipments.

The electric elevators, which aggregate a total of 125 horse power, are so arranged that movements of inbound freight do not conflict with outbound freight. So it is arrange throughout its entire big building. Every little detail has been looked after with a view of handling the business quickly and accurately.

Now stepping over the bridge brings one to the second floor of the Third street building. (This building has four stories and a cellar and has a frontage of seventy-five feet by a depth of 135 feet.) This extensive floor is devoted exclusively to samples of hardware, tools, etc. The samples are aranged in sections and follow each other in natural order, for example, one does not find a mechanics' tool side by side with a kitchen utensil. Each item is grouped in its proper section and can be very easily found by the customer as well as the salesman

On the first floor of this building are located the general offices and the cutlery and sporting goods department on the other. These departments show their samples on this floor. The third floor is devoted to the stock of sporting goods and cutlery. On the fourth floor is found the catalogue and printing departments on one side and the salesmen's sampling department on the other. The cellar of the building is utilized for the stock of nails and wire and horseshoes.



Photo Contributed by Bill Magee

This company strives day after day by this wonderful system of organized effort to place goods in the hands of their customers, no matter how large or small, with very few mistakes. Their customers are, therefore, very seldom annoyed or disappointed by not having their orders executed properly.

A shipping record is kept from day to day. This record is compiled on a percentage basis, and the orders are divided into two groups--mail orders and regular orders. The records show that on an average of 80 percent of the mail orders are shipped on the day that they are received, and of the regular orders, 55 percent are shipped on the day they are received, and generally all on the second day.

The "Witte IXL Square" trade-mark is placed on only good, honest, reliable hardware and is an indicator to the trade of such merchandise, and the dealer when selling a tool which bears this trade-mark know that the customer will have lasting satisfaction and will never regret having purchased anything that bears this well known mark.

The growth of the Witte Hardware Company is evidenced not alone by its extensions of buildings, but by its frequent increases in capital stock. Starting with a capital of \$110,000, it has been increased until the capital is not \$400,000. The company originally had two traveling salesman, and it now has fifty covering all of the Middle States, from Minnesota to Texas to the Pacific Coast.

Otto H. Witte, president of the company was born in Wehden, Germany, June 18, 1848; graduated from the Gymnasium (High School for those going onto College) at Minden, Germany. Came to St. Louis in 1862; entered the hardware firm of F.E. Schmieding and Co, St. Louis. Bought out that firm (with brother, the late F.A. Witte) in 1873.

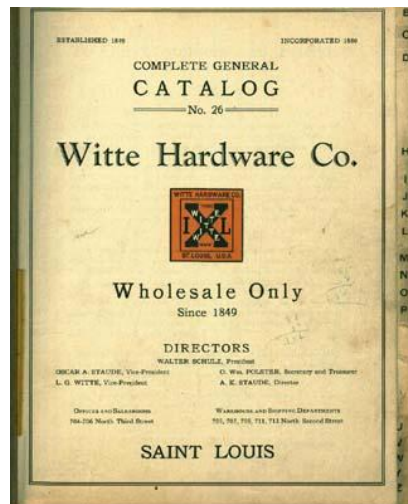
F.A. Witte, secretary of the company. Born in St. Louis, October 2, 1868. Was educated at the Smith Academy, St. Louis, until May, 1881, then attended the Real Gymnasium (College) at Oldenburg, Germany and graduated from this celebrated institution April, 1885. Entered the employ of the company as a clerk in November,

1885, going through all the different departments. On January 1, 1896, was elected secretary of the company.

Editor's Comment: I think after reading the rhetoric and content of this article, you will feel as I do that it was not a "news" article, but a "paid promotion piece" RJS

OK, THCKK MEMBERS as Paul Harvey says, "What's the rest of the story?" Is it still in business? What year did it close? Why? Did it have a business evolution and marketing history similar to Simmons and Shapleigh? Was it assimilated by another company? What were some of its other name brands or trademarks, if any? Send in your findings, please.

We'd like more history and pictures of Witte Hardware, from postcards to price tags, from planes to pocket knives, etc. Your help in providing our members more information will be greatly appreciated. Thanks. RJS



Contributed by Leo Rockenstein

• THCKK is a not-for-profit organization formed in March of 1996. It serves to distribute information and provide an interactive forum about vintage hardware companies such as E.C. Simmons, (Keen Kutter), A.F. Shapleigh (Diamond Edge) and The Winchester Store (and the popular collectibles bearing their logos and associated house brands) as well as other historically interesting hardware companies such as "Our Very Best" (Hibbard, Spencer & Bartlett), Blue Grass (Belknap Hardware), Stanley, etc. are included as interest dictates (Witte, Wyeth, Lee, Sargent, etc)

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