

C.W. Klemm (1845-1930)

Carl Wilhelm (C.W.) Klemm was born on May 1, 1845, in Haynrode, Saxony, Germany. His grandfather sold Brazilian coffee, and his father was a dry goods merchant. Klemm had two brothers: Julius, who worked in the lumber business, and Robert, who was a lawyer. When he was fifteen, Klemm began working as an apprentice clerk in Potsdam, Germany. At twenty, he started a clerk job for three years before moving to the United States to further his business career.

Klemm arrived in New York City in 1868. Shortly after his arrive, he was offered a job by his cousin, C.A. Gehrman, who owned a store in Springfield, Illinois. Klemm accepted the offer and worked there for five years, earning \$5 a week. But he wanted more. In 1873, Klemm decided to move to Bloomington, Illinois, a growing town with more opportunities. He opened a dry goods and millinery store at 107 West Jefferson Street that winter. He lived above the store and ate at a local hotel to save money.

His business grew rapidly, and by 1883, Klemm expanded by renting the second floor of his building. In 1890, he bought the building next door, and by 1895, he expanded again. His store became one of the most successful businesses in Central Illinois, employing over 200 people.

Klemm was known for his hard work and honesty. He paid his bills quickly to get discounts and always made sure customers were satisfied. He believed in selling only good, honest products. Klemm rarely traveled, except to buy new merchandise in New York. His employees admired him so much that they sent him roses every year on his birthday, and in 1920, they presented him with a silver cup to honor his work.

He was also very involved in the community, serving on boards for local organizations, including the Bloomington Loan and Homestead Association, Third and First National Banks, the Withers Public Library, and Brokaw Hospital. He also supported charities and served as a trustee for the Unitarian Church.

In 1874, Klemm married Augusta Seibel, and they had three children: Helene, Clara, and Carl H. Klemm believed in education and encouraged his children to take music lessons and read good books. Every Sunday, the family would enjoy nature after church. Tragically, his wife Augusta died in a terrible accident at their home in 1886. She suffered burns from a gas explosion while Klemm was in New York. After her death, Klemm married Emelie Bender in 1889, and they had one son, Julius.

Klemm faced more hardships, including the Downtown Bloomington Fire of 1900, which destroyed his store. However, he quickly rebuilt his business and was back up and running within seven months. His store celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1923. Klemm's business survived three economic downturns, but the Great Depression in 1930 hit his store hard, the same year he passed away.

C.W. Klemm died on February 23, 1930, after two weeks of illness. He continued working at his store right up until his death. He was buried next to his second wife, Emelie, at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. His store continued to operate for many years after his death but eventually closed in 1981.