

# The Stulz Brothers, a German-American Business in Kansas City

Kevin Kurdylo, Winter 2011



Mädels working in the Kansas City offices of the Stulz Brothers.

A recent addition to MKI's Published in America collection is the *Neuestes Deutsches Liederbuch*, a 240-page book of German songs donated by Edward Plagemann in honor of his mother. Only the second German-language book that appeared in Kansas City, Missouri, that we have in our library, it was self-published "von den Stulzen Brüdern" (by the Stulz brothers). The songs are predominately folksongs from Europe—with two about Columbia, symbol of America—but discoveries from within the songbook itself and from research on the internet confirm that it is a fascinating piece of German-Americana.

Just who were the Stulz brothers? The very first page of the songbook bears their images, two bespectacled and mustached men identified only as S. C. and E. A. Stulz. Online searching reveals that their company, Stulz Bros., was a wine

and liquor importer and wholesaler based in Kansas City that may also have owned or had interests in vineyards in Sonoma, California. Promotional glassware and other items, as well as some printed materials, are available for sale to collectors today, but only a little information on the business can be found.<sup>1</sup> Apparently Stulz Bros. was in business from 1893 until 1918, and was located in three different buildings in Kansas City over that time.<sup>2</sup> The business ended just as Prohibition was about to begin, though whether there was a connection we cannot say. Further searching reveals that the brothers were named (Simon) Sigmund/Sigismund Carl (1860–1928) and Emil Arnold (1864–1917). Both were born in Wittlich, in the Eifel, Germany, into a Jewish family that had come to the area from Klattau, southwest of Prague. The brothers emigrated to America in 1886 and settled in Kansas

City in 1887.

Why did the Stulz brothers publish this book of German songs? Obviously the book served as a promotional item for their business, with several pages at the end of the book devoted to price listings for wines and liquors. The choice of a songbook is fitting, as one can imagine that singing and drinking would go together for many German Americans; and the folksongs are from all over German-speaking Europe, thus increasing the book's appeal among their German-American clientele. But wait, there's more! Almost every word in this book tells us something about the way S. C. and E. A. Stulz ran their business, and perhaps even a little about what they considered to be important in life. Scattered throughout the pages, where space allowed, mixed in among short adages and witticisms, one can find information about the company and its services:

“Unsere Waare<sup>3</sup> muss sich selbst loben” (our product speaks for itself); “Wir wollen Jeden zufriedustellen, das ist bei uns die Hauptsache” (customer satisfaction is our number one priority); “Stulz Brothers Lagerfässer halten zusammen 375,000 Gallonen” ([our] storage casks together hold 375,000 gallons); “Wer uns einen neuen Kunden bringt, bekommt immer ein schoenes Geschenk” (whoever brings us a new customer will always receive a lovely gift); “Stulz Brothers haben ihre eigene Druckerei [und] Kistenfabrik” ([we] have [our] own print shop [no doubt responsible for this very songbook] and packing facility); and this interesting political message, “Die Trusts bedrücken die Farmer, den Geschäftsmann, den Handwerker, Arbeiter, wir haben nichts mit den Trusts zu thun” (monopolies oppress farmers, merchants, craftsmen, and workers—we have nothing to do with monopolies).

The Stulz brothers place a great deal of significance on the singing of German songs, particularly as a means of maintaining the German language and culture in America. At the top of the title page is a motto sometimes found in books of popular German *Lieder*, “Wo man singt, da lass’ Dich ruhig nieder! Boese Menschen haben keine Lieder;”



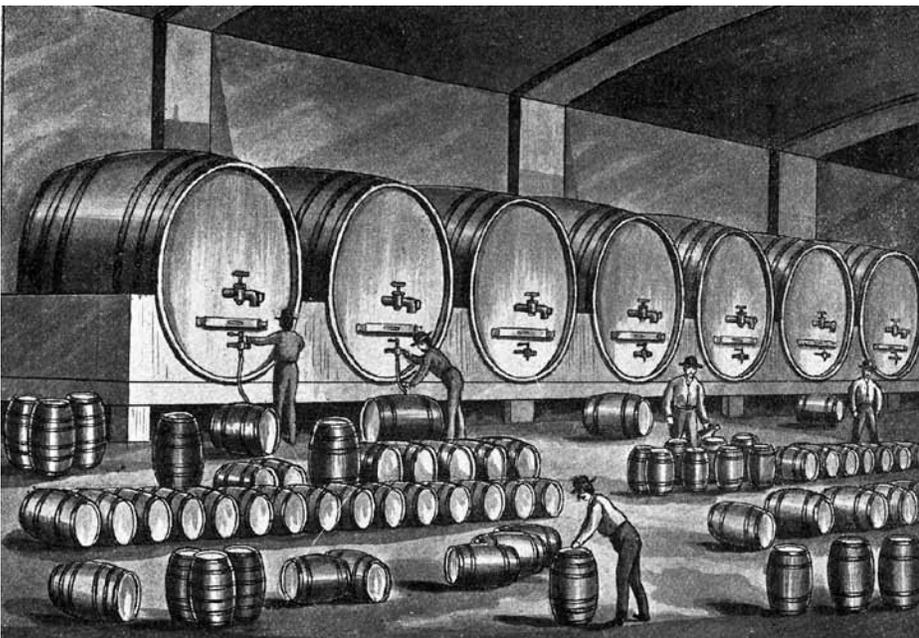
E. C. Stulz.



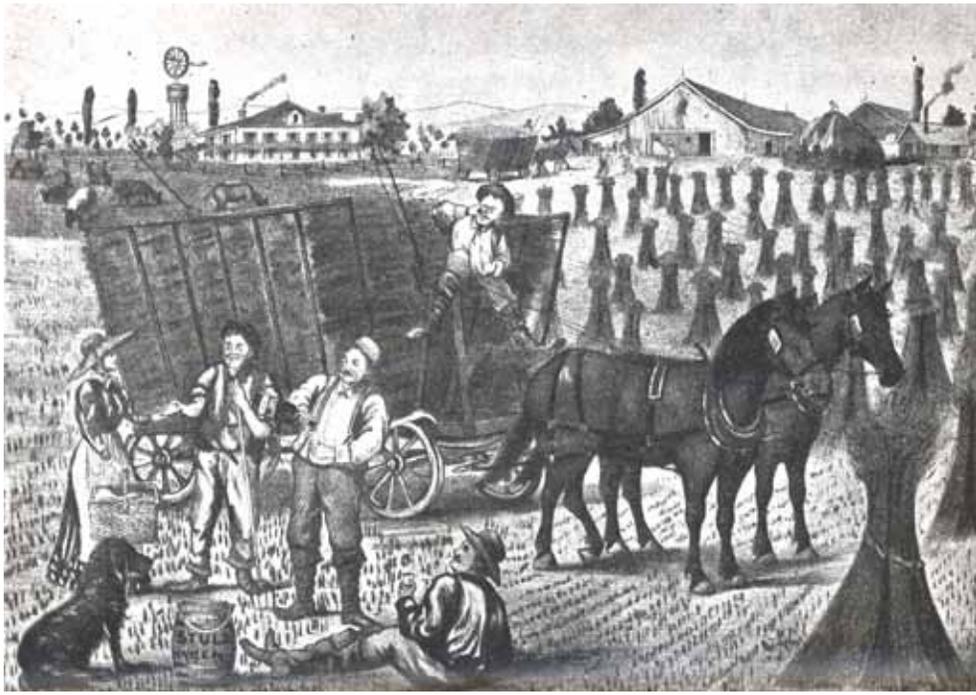
G. H. Stulz.

or “Make yourself at home where you hear singing, for wicked people sing no songs.”<sup>4</sup> In the prologue we read that the brothers are delighted to have finished their newest German songbook,<sup>5</sup> and proud to be able to contribute to the promotion and preservation of good, robust German traditions in America. This book, they believe, will help the children of German-speaking immigrants appre-

ciate the language of their fathers; singing these songs will make them proud to be and to remain German. The brothers ask, “Are there any more beautiful, more graceful, more euphonic melodies, than the German?” By having your children sing these German songs, they insist, you not only help preserve the German language, but you make them aware that “the blood of the heroes of Germany” flows in their veins. The brothers are confident that these songs will help to instill and sustain such German traits as loyalty, honesty, sincerity, brotherly love, and gratitude (particularly toward their parents) in the young generation, making them “gute und brauchbare amerikanische Bürger” (good and useful American citizens) imbued with German virtues and a German conscience. It is for such a lofty goal that the Stulz brothers have spared “weder Mühe noch Zeit oder Kosten, um dieses Buch heraus zu geben” (neither effort or expense to publish this book). Having dedicated their book to the “honest German pioneer of the great American West” (of which Missouri was once a part), we can imagine that the motto from the title



A graphic representation of the storage capacity at the Stulz Brothers’ facility.



Moderate drinkers, enjoying a fine Stulz product.

page applied both to people seeking a hospitable tavern as well as immigrants seeking the right place to establish their new home.

After an admonishing poem by Theodor Müller entitled “Vergesst die deutsche Sprache nicht!” (forget not the German language!) comes a remarkable vignette about “*unser Freund Fritz Gutschluck und seine Familie.*” We first see a picture of a large family gathered together, and the story begins by referring to this image, “Well, well famose Familie; wer ist denn das?”<sup>6</sup> We are told it is Fritz with his four sons and three daughters, that two daughters and one son are already married and have families of their own, and all are happy and prosperous. Despite the slapstick humor behind his name (Gut-schluck translates roughly to “Good-swallow” or “Good-draught”),<sup>7</sup> Fritz’s story contains realistic details and is one that many German Americans might have found familiar. He comes from northern Germany and his wife from southern Germany, and they met in “Mitteldeutschland,” just to be all-inclusive. Fritz worked for a rich landowner and Lotte was a cook. What

follows is a translation of a portion of the story:

Well, Fritz, like many others, saw that it would be difficult to become a millionaire in Germany; he had a cousin in Cincinnati, so he scraped together enough to go to America. And in 1872, on a beautiful May morning, a respectable young German with strong arms, good cheer, an honest face, and 65 cents in his pocket, arrived in Cincinnati. He quickly got a good position “Over the Rhine,” as the good people of Cincinnati named this city district, and the following Christmas Lotte received a fine locket with Fritz’s picture in it, a ticket to Cincinnati, and a letter:

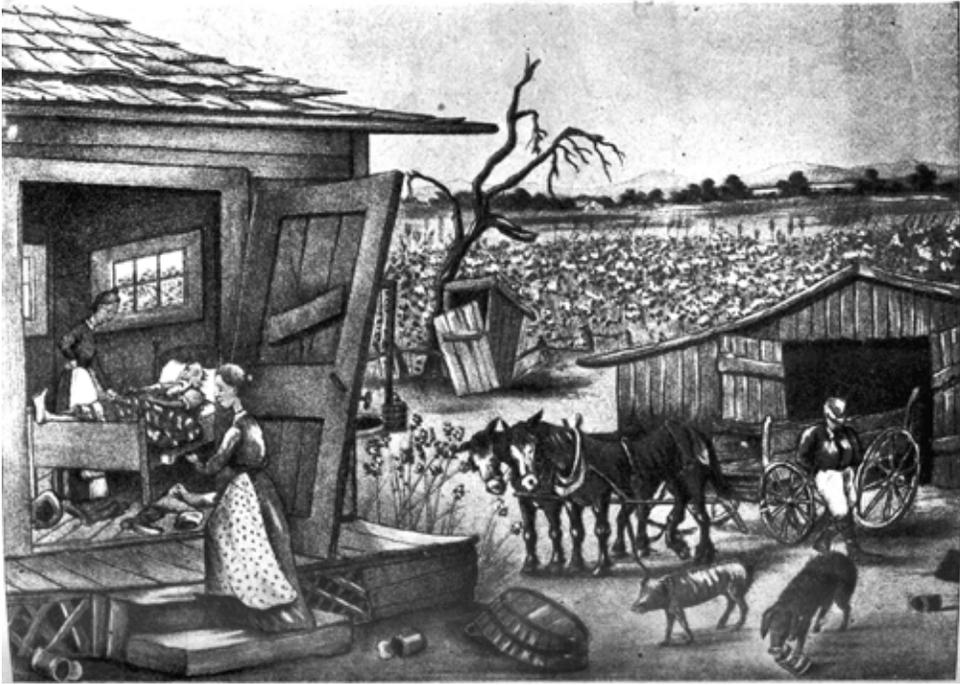
“My lovely Lotte, sweet angel, Only Sweetheart [in English in the original text], etc. I have a good job and earn enough to make a good life. Enclosed I send a ticket for you to come to Cincinnati—come as quickly as a telephone call or telegraph, or swim as fast as you can, so that I may soon clasp you to my heart and provide you with a good

home in the new homeland.”<sup>8</sup>

Well, Lotte took courage and on 12 April 1873 she arrived alive and well on the banks of the beautiful Ohio River and soon thereafter became Mrs. Gutschluck. Fritz earned good money, his wife was thrifty, and in two years they had saved enough to buy a modest home; they then heard of the ample opportunities for farmers in the great West, and of the spacious land that today provides the world with bread, meat, horses, mules [yes, and “Mules” in the original text], gold, silver, lead, coal, and so on.

Well, like many others, Fritz and family joined the great human migration to the grand West; in the beginning they went through a lot, suffering grasshoppers and hard times, but with perseverance and frugality they accomplished so much that today they can look back with pride [and here there is a play with the word *Stolz* meaning pride and the name of *Stulz*]. Fritz has a large, productive farm and money in the bank, his children are married and off to a good start, he is well respected and served as County Commissioner (though not on the Prohibition Ticket), and he is more content than most millionaires.

This is much the same story for thousands upon thousands of our German pioneers, and many will say, “My own experience was similar and I can look back with pride on my accomplishments.” The old pioneers are passing away, there are fewer and fewer of them remaining as they go to that place where we all eventually will go. But the German pioneer in America will assume a place in history as a shining example for coming generations, and his accomplishments are the best inheritance for his children. We dedicate this book to Fritz Gutschluck and all honorable German pioneers!



The “water fanatic,” whose obsession has ruined him.

After the story of Fritz Gutschluck are two pictures that illustrate the German-American attitude toward those who advocate the prohibition of alcohol: one shows a prosperous farm and the other shows a farm in a state of terrible neglect. The first picture is identified as “the moderate drinker,” and the second as “the water fanatic.” The text describes the images, but hastens to add, “We certainly don’t mean to suggest that a man who does not drink inevitably has nothing or is not good at anything.” After all, there are even good people among those who abstain, like the one who doesn’t care to drink but has nothing against those who do, or the one who has a fanatical wife and doesn’t drink to keep peace in his family, or the one who doesn’t drink because it would be bad for business, or because he is “zu stingy.” Some don’t drink if others can see them (ah, but behind closed doors!), and some don’t drink because they have no sense of moderation, and it is better to leave alcohol entirely alone. “Get the best of liquor, but let not liquor get the best of you!” heisst es in amerikanisch,” for

nothing is sadder than a drunkard, and every moderate drinker should do what he can to bring a drunkard to the right path. The brothers declare that they are in business to sell their goods to sensible people, and not to drunkards: “We don’t sell our products to harm people; and if someone often drinks more than he should, he should stay away from drink altogether. If we know someone drinks too much, then he cannot buy from us. Of course one cannot always know such a thing, but if you know a man who constantly drinks too much, then you would do us a favor if you communicate this to us.”

The Stulz brothers are proud that 95 percent of their customers are good Germans who have been purchasing from them for twenty years (which would place the publication of this undated songbook at around 1913). They list the many regions from which German speakers come, saying that “they all drink their drink, work, have large families, and make progress in the world: they are the best argument against the Prohibition fanatic.” The prologue con-

cludes with this interesting tale: “Once I met a good German doctor in an area of German farmsteads. We chatted about our soldiering days in Germany and then I said to him, ‘Doc, do you find this area agreeable? Very nice Germans, and all of them drinking Stulz products.’ (*Sehr nette Deutsche, trinken alle Stulzschen Schluck.*) ‘Ye-e-e-es,’ said the learned man, ‘It’s quite comfortable here, and everyone is very friendly. And the drink, which they regularly get from you, is splendid. But there is *one* problem: the fellows are never ill, and I can barely make a living. I believe, your drink is keeping them healthy.’ The doctor had hit the nail on the head.”

The idea of “medicinal alcohol” is elaborated upon later in the book, where we find these cautionary words: “Many purveyors with large mouths and little consciences recommend spirits as cures for serious diseases. One often finds bitters advocated as a universal remedy for maladies of the stomach, liver, lungs, and so on; gin as the best way to improve bad kidneys, ears, noses, throat, brain, etc. Clearly it takes someone of few scruples to advise something so very wrong. In many cases liquor can be a good tonic, but not a cure for serious diseases. On the contrary, a good doctor knows that alcohol can exacerbate kidney and severe gastric troubles. If one is ill with stomach or renal diseases, one should consult a reliable doctor, not a miracle worker, and drink *nothing* except what a physician permits.”

There are many other interesting things in this remarkable songbook. Beyond information about how transportation has improved in the American West and how buying from a wholesaler can save one money, how advertising inflates the costs of inferior products and causes one to purchase “hot air,” how the Stulz brothers go about procuring their whiskies and brandies, their anti-Trust sentiments, and their money-back guarantee, we have found these additional tidbits to share.

Near the end of the book we are told, just before the listings of wines and liquors, “Well, dear friend, if you have sung your way to this point, then perhaps you have developed a thirst. *Sind gesungen die Lieder und trocken die Kehlen, dann denkt an uns Brüder, guter Schluck wird nicht fehlen.* (When the songs are sung and throats are dry, then think of us brothers and a good sip will be nigh.) Since this is a songbook we didn’t want to take up too much room with our catalog, so that we could fit in as many songs as possible. But first we offer a picture of a few of the pretty gals in our office. These aren’t all of them, as a few were too bashful [this word is given in English in the original text] to appear in the picture.”

We’ll close with two final quotes, the first a free translation of a Bavarian jingle used here as advertising.

*Schnadahupferl aus Drytown:*

Water does not whet my whistle  
 But here we can’t get wine  
 Because the Prohibition thistle  
 Has smothered the good vine.  
 But soon I’ll have my druthers  
 I’ll write Stulz’s for a little wine  
 And then those Temperance Brothers  
 Can slide off my behind!

Remember, folks, Stulz Bros. has a reputation for good merchandise! We don’t spend anything on empty advertising, and you get a good, honest product, universally recognized and renowned from Maine to California, from Texas to Minnesota, from Florida to British Columbia. 🍷

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Most of it here: <[http://www.pre-pro.com/mid-core/view\\_vendor.php?vid=MCI11317](http://www.pre-pro.com/mid-core/view_vendor.php?vid=MCI11317)>.

<sup>2</sup>At 605 W 5th (1893–1897), 1416 Main (1898–1905), 618–620 Southwest Blvd. (1906–1915), and 2043 Main (1916–1918). Their San Francisco office was at 717 Battery Street.

<sup>3</sup>The spelling of “Ware” with two “a”s was common before 1902, when Duden dictionaries became the arbiters of German orthography. There are many other instances of “older” spellings in the songbook.

<sup>4</sup>Believed to have been written originally by Johann Gottfried Seume, 1763–1810.

<sup>5</sup>In the prologue we are also told, “Wie ja so ungefähr jeder Deutsche in Amerika weiss, haben wir schon viele Auflagen von Büchern deutscher Lieder herausgegeben” (as just about every German in America knows, we have already published several editions of German songbooks). Searches of various on-line library catalogs have not uncovered any other books published by the Stulz brothers, and we can only hope that some exist in private collections.

<sup>6</sup>The use of the English “well” becomes more pronounced the further one reads in the songbook; it appears to have been adopted completely by the

authors (who we presume are the Stulz brothers themselves, or at least one of them). Other “Americanisms” and influences from the English language can also be seen in the German text.

<sup>7</sup>There are a few online references that indicate Stulz Bros. distributed or perhaps even produced a “Gutschluck Beer.”

<sup>8</sup>In the German this is “komme sofort bei Telefon, Telegraph, oder schwimme herüber so schnell Du kannst”—the author is playing with the language and using anglicisms, as “bei” would not be the proper preposition in German.



The advantages of buying at wholesale prices can be counted on one’s fingers.

These are the prices of the great

## Gutschluck Beer

|                                     |        |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| Case of 2 dozen large bottles . . . | \$3.75 |
| “ “ 4 “ small “ . . . . .           | 4 05   |
| Refund for case with empties . . .  | 1.25   |
| Barrel of 6 dozen large bottles . . | 9.15   |
| “ “ 10 “ small “ . . . . .          | 9 50   |
| Refund for Bbl. with empty bottles  | 2.25   |

We do not pay the freight on the Beer but we pay the freight on the empties and as soon as empty packages are received we mail a check for refund.

This advertisement for Gutschluck Beer comes from a price list in the Paul Gronquist collection. It is not certain if Stulz Brothers produced or only distributed this product.