

The Stiftskeller Murals at the UW–Madison Memorial Union Restored

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The Beer Brigade

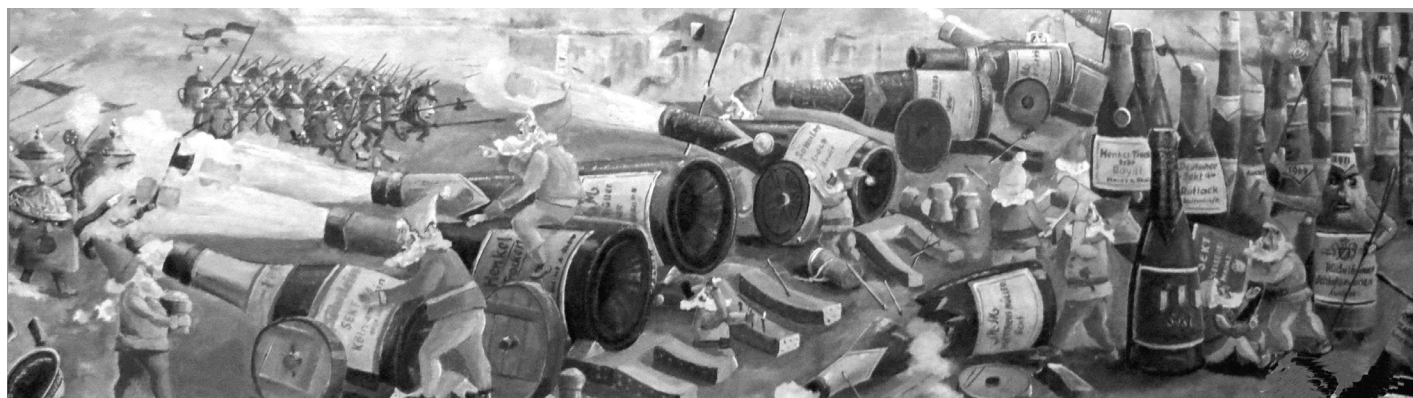
It is well known that Wisconsin has a history of being the soil into which many German-speaking immigrants put roots, so it is not surprising to find a European-style *Rathskeller* and *Stiftskeller* in the Memorial Union at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Complete with soaring arches, vaulted ceilings, dark wood, evocative murals with German slogans, displays of beer steins, and—of course—a bar serving beer, these spaces where students congregate are also used and appreciated by towns-

folk and visitors alike.

However, an official history of these areas (Porter Butts, *Der Rathskeller & der Stiftskeller 1928–1978*) claims that the German themes were accidental, or perhaps providential. In 1927 Leon Pescheret, the Union's French-born interior designer, was inspired by the bare space to remark on its similarity to a *Rathskeller*, or the cellar of a German village hall, where city fathers gathered for relaxation and refreshment after work. Since the space was intended for the fellowship

and refreshment of students, Pescheret was given permission to transform it along the lines of a *Rathskeller*. The murals, and with German mottos, were created by Eugene Hausler, who had been trained in Germany and was most familiar with *Rathskeller* décor.

The adjoining *Stiftskeller*, or “cellar of the founders,” was created in 1962 when more space was needed for the overly-crowded *Rathskeller*. While the German theme was continued, a lack of funds delayed the addition of murals until 1978, when Kurt Schaldach, a German painter living in Milwaukee, was commissioned for the job. Schaldach was born in 1913 in Danzig and studied art there before coming to the United States in 1952. An artist with focus, it took Schaldach barely two months to decorate all the walls of the *Stiftskeller*. One of his most striking murals here is a scene depicting the “Battle between Beer and Wine.” Based upon the mural in the Munich *Rathskeller*, it portrays an army of beer steins streaming out of a town to assault a contingent of gnomes employing wine and champagne bottles with



The Wine Army



Kurt Schaldach, working on "When Wine and Beer Make War On Each Other"

cork cannonballs to defend their Rhine Valley castle.

Recent renovations to the *Stiftskeller* initiated a project to restore Schaldach's murals, undertaken by a team of conservators and highly trained artists from Conrad Schmitt Studios of New Berlin, Wisconsin, who carefully traced and photographed the murals so that details could be preserved and replicated with accuracy, right down to individual brush strokes. After four months of reconstruction, the popular gathering space has reopened, and visitors may now examine the murals—and enjoy a refreshing beverage—once again. 🍷



Wine after beer, that's my advice.
Beer after wine, think twice.



Sign seen as one leaves the *Rathskeller*