



Adolphus Busch

BY SUE DE PASQUALE

CALLING CARDS MAY HAVE BEEN FINE FOR THE TYPICAL SALESMAN, BUT NOT FOR ADOLPHUS BUSCH.





When the flamboyant, German-born beer baron tirelessly toured the United States promoting Budweiser, he instead left behind a gold-plated pocketknife with a peephole. Those who peered curiously through the hole were treated to a picture of ... Adolphus himself.

It was audacious acts of self-promotion like these, coupled with an uncanny ability to anticipate the next Big Thing, that enabled Busch in the late 1800s to build the beer empire that remains the largest in the world today. The family-owned Anheuser-Busch Co. produces more than 100 million barrels of beer annually, and Busch's signature brew, Budweiser, remains the "King of Beers," outselling all other domestic premium beers combined.

Adolphus Busch's exquisite taste and penchant for lavish estates with beautiful gardens also laid the groundwork for the contemporary Busch Entertainment Corp., which today owns nine theme parks throughout the United States that attract more than 20 million visitors a year.

Busch's entry into the business world was inauspicious enough. The 21st of 22 children, he left Hamburg for the United States in 1857 at the age of 18, hoping to make his fortune. He was among a huge exodus of his countrymen—an

estimated 4 million—that emigrated during the latter half of the 19th century to settle in cities across the United States.

Germans loved their lager, and the local brewery quickly became the nucleus within these German enclaves—nowhere more so than in St. Louis, Mo., where young Adolphus settled. "There was perhaps more beer consumed in St. Louis while the breweries were running full blast than in any other city of its size in the world," wrote Gerald Holland in 1919, in a four-part series for H.L. Mencken's *American Mercury*. "With beer at five cents a glass, it was a luxury within reach of everyone, however humble." Using money from a family inheritance, Busch purchased a partnership in a beer supply company.

One of his customers was Eberhard Anheuser—a partner in a struggling brewery—whose attractive daughter, Lilly, caught the eye of the young beer supply salesman. The two were wed on March 7, 1861 (in a double ceremony with Adolphus' brother Ulrich and Lilly's sister Anna) and three years later Adolphus joined his father-in-law's brewery as a salesman. Busch traveled to Europe to get a better understanding of the beer-making business, and in 1869 bought out his father-in-law's partner.

Adolphus Busch was poised to make his mark, and he did it by thinking big. Until that time, beer production was a local endeavor. All beer was brewed, stored in kegs, and consumed in neighborhood saloons. It couldn't be shipped because it would spoil within a few days. But during his European travels, Busch had seen a new heating process used to neutralize active organisms in drinks. He decided to implement the pasteurization process at the St. Louis brewery—a first for American brewers.

Now beer could be bottled and brought into the home, opening a whole new market. Before long, Busch was mass-producing millions of bottles of beer. This innovation coincided with America's burgeoning new railway system that made it possible, by 1869, to transport goods all the way across the country on the first transcontinental railroad. Busch had his product and the means to ship it wide and far. And, in the 1880s, he became the first American brewer to utilize the new-fangled artificial refrigeration—in stock houses, refrigerated railroad cars and icehouses strategically placed along the railway lines.

With the death of Eberhard Anheuser in 1880, Adolphus Busch became president of the newly renamed Anheuser-Busch Brewing Association, and he set out to market the company's popular light-colored lager Budweiser (named for the Bavarian city of Budweis, from which the recipe originated) with an unparalleled zeal. He bought up real estate and installed sales agents in cities in every state, purchased railroads, hotels and a coal mine, and launched billboard advertising and promotional giveaways at local saloons. Riding in his luxurious railway car, aptly named "The Adolphus," he spread the gospel of Budweiser across the nation.

A snappy dresser, with a carefully trimmed mustache and goatee, and a deep, accented voice, Busch was a commanding presence. According to one account, "He walked with the ramrod stiffness of a Prussian sergeant-major, relaxed with the loose-jointedness of an adagio dancer. He was stern in the hour of decision, jovial in the time for hospitality, and played the role of the merchant prince." The beer baron was the first to open his brewery to public tours, and enjoyed strolling through the production floors and walking around the brewery grounds, where his appreciative workers bowed in deference as he passed. "See, just like der king," he joked once to a reporter.

As production increased, the St. Louis plant grew, at 142 acres nearly dwarfing the city itself. By the late 1800s, the plant employed 7,500 men and had an annual payroll exceeding \$10 million, according to Holland's 1919 account. Busch expected his employees to partake liberally of free beer during the workday, an expectation that no



Opposite page: A brewery wagon is unloaded in New York after being sent from St. Louis, Mo., by the Anheuser-Busch Co.

This page, top to bottom: Brewery kegs; Eberhard Anheuser; one of the famous Budweiser Clydesdales.





Top: Busch's actual gardens behind his Pasadena, Calif., home opened to the public in 1905. Bottom: Anheuser-Busch Brewery in St. Louis, Mo.

doubt endeared him to his workforce. By the turn of the century, Anheuser-Busch was producing 1 million barrels of beer annually.

Adolphus Busch was a very rich man and he enjoyed living like one. A free spender, he made frequent visits to the restaurant of friend Tony Faust, where he bought rounds of drinks for everyone and showed off his knowledge of fine wine. On some evenings the connoisseur would ask to have 10 different wines brought to the table. After just one sip, Busch would ceremoniously identify each bottle's particular vintage, much to the delight of all assembled.

Adolphus and Lilly loved fine things, a passion reflected in their four sprawling estates—in St. Louis; the hops-growing region of Cooperstown, N.Y.; Pasadena, Calif.; and in Germany, in a castle on the Rhine. All their homes were beautifully furnished, with expensive paintings, and featured extensive gardens decorated with German-made statuary. Ever the entertainers, their guest lists were a veritable Who's Who of influential Americans—everyone from presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, to actress Sarah Bernhardt, singer Enrico Caruso and the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII).

Philanthropy was not lost on Adolphus Busch. He made substantial gifts to Washington University in St. Louis and to Harvard University, among other institutions. (For some curious reason, he also donated \$5,000 each Groundhog Day to a convent in St. Louis.) And in the early 1900s, he and Lilly decided to open the gardens of their California home

to the public. Busch had selected Pasadena as the site for their winter home because he considered the area “a veritable paradise.”

“It has no equal in the world regarding healthful climate, scenery, vegetation, flowers, shrubberies, fruit and general comfort of living,” he said. Busch Gardens, which opened to the public in 1905, quickly became dubbed the “Eighth Wonder of the World.”

Busch employed 30 expert gardeners annually to maintain the grounds' 14 miles of pathways and 100,000 plants and shrubs. The tourists who flocked there (no doubt aided by the addition of a stop on the Pacific Electric Railway) delighted in the gardens' gorgeous plants, rare birds and unique statuary. In a nod to his Bavarian roots, Busch had imported 100 painted statues that brought to life the characters in Grimm's fairy tales—Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel and the gingerbread house. A popular filming location for Hollywood directors, Busch Gardens became the backdrop for a variety of best-selling movies of the period, including *Gone With the Wind* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*.

When Adolphus and Lilly celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1911, it was a cause of great celebration for the citizens of St. Louis. At a festive party held at the city's Coliseum, revelers consumed an estimated 40,000 bottles of free beer. The city's leaders sent a solid gold card of congratulations to the couple, who celebrated at a second event in California. Fittingly enough, Adolphus, the “king” of American brewers, bestowed upon his beloved wife a gift fit for a queen—a diamond-studded tiara.

Sadly, by this time Adolphus had been ailing for several years. He died on October 10, 1913 at age 74, at Villa Lilly, the castle on the Rhine he had named for his wife. All of St. Louis mourned the death of its merchant prince. In a stately funeral procession that included 6,000 brewery workers marching in line, some 25 trucks were needed to transport the funeral flowers alone.

Adolphus Busch left behind a fortune valued at \$60 million—and an admonition to his son August A. Busch Sr., who stepped up to lead Anheuser-Busch, to “build upon the good quality of our beer and our high standing with the public.”