

Charles Leich & Company

Founded: 1854

Location: 38 Main Street, Evansville (1854–); 34 Main Street; Third and Main (may be same as 34 Main); 18 Main Street; 22 Upper First Street; 206 Upper First Street; 209 Upper First Street (early 1880s–); 18–20 Sycamore (Lemcke & Company); 117–121 Upper First (1890–1914); 420 N.W. Fifth Street (1914–)

Charles Leich escaped the revolutionary in 1848 by sailing for the United States. The fifteen-year-old German immigrant embarked at New Orleans and made his way up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to Evansville. There he apprenticed with a retail druggist named Crawford Bell. In 1854, only six years after his arrival in the country, Leich was able to become a partner in a wholesale firm at 38 Main Street. For the next thirty-six years Leich's business partnerships and locations varied. He established a partnership with August C. Carlstedt at least as early as 1858. Leich & Carlstedt, located at 34 (later 38) Main Street, were wholesale druggists, but they also dealt in paints, oils, window glass, and liquor. The firm continued through the Civil War. After the war Leich was briefly associated with Thomas G. Maghee and dealt in a similarly wide variety of products, including chemicals, dyes, perfumes, and toilet articles.

Leich then entered into a long business association with Alexander Lemcke. Lemcke and his brother Julius Augustus were also German immigrants. They made their fortunes in Evansville. Julius owned steamboats, built the St. George Hotel (and later the Lemcke Building in Indianapolis), and was president of the Evansville Woolen Mill. He also was active in state and local politics, eventually serving as state treasurer.

Alexander began in the general merchandise business in Posey County, then moved to

Evansville and went into business with Charles Leich. Leich seems to have had a personal connection with Lemcke as well; he was married to Wilhelmine Lemcke.

Their firm thrived, first on Main Street and later on Upper First Street, as Evansville became a major wholesaling center for the state. Leich & Lemcke's offices were in the wholesale district, where the streets were crowded with drays and wagons transporting all manner of merchandise back and forth between steamboats, warehouses, and the major wholesaling offices. In the early 1880s Leich renewed his partnership with Carlstedt and, for a number of years, the two men, joined by Peter Vierling, operated as Leich, Vierling & Carlstedt at 209 Upper First Street. From 1887 to 1890 Leich does not seem to have been in business for himself but was associated with Lemcke & Company, the wholesale drug firm of the Lemcke brothers. In 1890, however, he established Charles Leich & Company with his son, Carl, and Alexander Lemcke as partners. Lemcke withdrew from the firm after about five years.

Charles Leich & Company, like Leich's previous firms, was a wholesale druggist and dealt in assorted other products from paint to window glass. It was located at 117 Upper First Street. Carl, who had entered his father's business in 1879, assumed management responsibilities in 1890. Eventually, three of Charles's other sons—Walter, Herbert, and Clarence—became partners in the firm. In 1914 the company moved its operations to a building acquired from the Evansville Woolen Mill on the corner of Fifth and Bond Streets. Charles Leich died in Germany in 1919. Charles Leich & Company was incorporated in 1929. In 1948 Carl and Herbert both died; Walter assumed the presidency of the company. By the 1950s the third generation of the Leich family was assuming leadership: Walter's son, Robert M. Leich, became president in 1957, and

Herbert's son, Alexander Lemcke Leich, served as vice president and treasurer. In 1973 Robert's son, Robert M. Leich, Jr., purchased all of the stock in the company held by members of the Leich family. He became president and treasurer of the newly consolidated firm. His father continued to serve as chairman of the board until his death in 1983. The company focused on wholesale distribution to strong, independent pharmacies. It also diversified. Through Pulse Computer Systems, Charles Leich & Company developed and marketed computer services (including data processing) and software to drugstores, hospitals, nursing homes, and related businesses. In the 1980s Charles Leich & Company canceled plans to move to the outskirts of Evansville and instead renovated its downtown location in the old Evansville Woolen Mill.