

Olsen-Stelzer Boots

SINCE 1900

By Danna Burns-Shaw

The History of Olsen-Stelzer Boots

Nocona, Texas was settled in the 1870's when cattlemen Broaddus and Jordan moved 15,000 cattle into the region and established a ranch not far from the present town site. In 1889, the railway arrived and with that news, boot maker Herman J. Justin "Daddy Joe" moved his boot shop from Spanish Fort, Texas, along the Chisholm Trail to Nocona, Texas.

Daddy Joe realized when he built boots along the Chisholm Trail that the cowboys needed tough and protective footwear. The cowboys needed a tall shaft to protect the calf of the leg from the constant contact with the saddle. The toe needed to be pointed to find the narrower stirrups back then and the high heel was a safety feature; it prevented the foot from slipping through the stirrup, getting hung up or worse, being drug to death.

When cowboys came to town on the cattle drives, they would go to Daddy Joe and have their feet measured. The cowboys did not have the money to pay Mr. Justin for their boots until they drove the cattle up the trail and delivered the herd, receiving payment upon delivery. Once they had their payday, they would make their way back down the Chisholm Trail to pick up their boots on the trip back home.

Soon after arriving in Nocona, word got out that Big Daddy Joe was the place to get your custom cowboy boots built. Carl Olsen was an immigrant shoemaker from Norway; he found his way to Nocona, Texas, and landed a job with Big Daddy and quickly became a top-producing boot maker for Big Daddy.

Olsen met Julius Stelzer, who was the production manager for the Justin Boot Company and married to Big Daddy Joe's daughter, Miss Enid Justin.

After several years working for Justin Boots, Carl decided to venture out on his own; so he and his family moved to the small North



ABOVE: Olsen-Stelzer boot with Bush Warrior Open and Purple Heart inlays for warrior who played in the Bush Warrior Open Golf Tournament; OPPOSITE PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: It's like taking a walk back in time with this Olsen-Stelzer ad; Another vintage Olsen-Stelzer ad; Olsen-Stelzer boots, a classic; Famous Gene Autry Blue-Bird Boot Circa mid-1930.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF OLSEN-STELZER BOOTS

Tom's desire to give back to those warriors that unconditionally gave so much, alongside Olsen-Stelzer, led to him becoming a proud partner of "Boots for Warriors."

Central Texas town of Henrietta and opened his own shop.

In this shop, Olsen began creating some of the most striking and memorable boot designs ever produced. Expanding on what he had learned at Justin, Carl's creativity expanded under his own roof. The extraordinary, custom handmade inlay designs would become the hallmark of the company.

One Becomes Two

In 1934, Julius Stelzer divorced Miss Enid and moved to Henrietta to join Olsen to form the Olsen-Stelzer Boot and Saddlery Company. Julius was a master of factory boot production; he was able to take Carl's beautiful designs and make them on a production line. Boots previously available to only a few quickly became available to many. By 1939, the company was producing 500 pairs of boots a week.

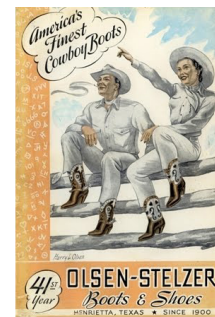
Carl Olsen's two sons, Norman and Harry, took on leadership roles in the company –with Norman serving as the business manager and Harry specializing in design and production.

In the 30's, 40's and 50's, Hollywood's Westerns transformed the cowboy lifestyle. The traditional, functional utilitarian fashion became clothing and boots with colorful creative patterns, featuring birds, flowers, butterflies, stars, bronc busters, oil derricks and individual customization. Hollywood movie stars and rich-folks alike now had the ability to design fun, wearable works of art. This, in turn, pushed Carl Olsen and his team's creativity even further – making Olsen-Stelzer the go-to for custom boots.

Boots for the Rich and Famous

Known for their superior craftsmanship and innovative new designs, Olsen-Stelzer boots were worn by the likes of John Wayne, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, President Harry S. Truman and even Prince Olaf and Princess Martha of Norway. Roy Rogers was partial to the "Eagle" design and the 1942 "Bluebird" boots made for Gene Autry are currently on display in the Autry Museum in Los Angeles, California.

The Olsen-Stelzer Company's reputation grew and their client list expanded. Its rich history, paired with their ability to build the highest quality of made-to-measure boots, kept them going strong for most of the 20th century... even through the ebbs and flows of the nation's economic tides.





Tough Times

By the 1980's – despite the Urban Cowboy craze – the economy in general was going through a period of major decline, especially the gas and oil industries in Texas. These industries were a big part of Olsen-Stelzer's business and they felt the effect of the economy's decline.

In 1988, after 88 years in business, the inevitable happened and Olsen-Stelzer sadly closed their doors.

Re-Birth

Just a couple years later though, the Olsen-Stelzer Boot Co. was fortunate enough to have a group of caring citizens from Henrietta, led by former Texas State Representative Tom Cartlidge, align a group of people with the vision of preserving and restoring the company to its original grandeur.

Mr. Cartlidge, a Marine Corps veteran and former national sales manager for Tony Lama, comes from a family with a rich history in the boot business. Cartlidge's parents began working for Olsen-Stelzer in 1938, and his first trips as an infant were traveling with his parents to the Olsen-Stelzer factory in Henrietta to check on production.

In 2011, Tom Cartlidge shared the company's story with a banker from Wichita Falls, who introduced him to Carl Winfrey. Together they developed a plan to restore and revive Olsen-Stelzer.

In 2012, Winfrey negotiated a licensing agreement for the name and acquired a boot manufacturing facility, to begin production of custom Olsen-Stelzer boots.

Tom Cartlidge was chosen to oversee all operations of the newly acquired facility, with one of his most important jobs being measuring for custom sizing.

Giving Back

Tom served our country in Vietnam. As a Marine Corp veteran he saw many soldiers injured and killed.



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– Tom Cartlidge

“I was around people who were blown up by mines,” said Cartlidge. “I was around people who were killed by mortar fire. I was around people who had been shot, and nothing ever happened to me. And I came back and realized how fortunate I was. And I always thought, I wish I could figure out some way to do something special for those who did suffer the wounds of war.”

Tom’s desire to give back to those warriors that unconditionally gave so much, alongside Olsen-Stelzer, led to him becoming a proud partner of “Boots for Warriors.”

Boots for Warriors provides handcrafted, custom fit “thank you’s,” in the form of cowboy boots, for our nation’s wounded warfighters of all branches of the military! They’ve supported nearly 100 wounded war veterans with a new pair of custom boots, purely out of the kindness of their hearts and the generosity of donors. To learn more and donate, please visit www.bootsforwarriors.org.

The Next Chapter

This past summer, Olsen-Stelzer was acquired by a Texas-based investment group, GG&E Boots, LLC.

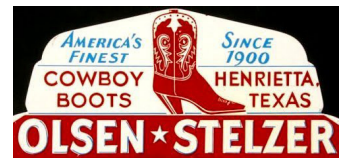
About the acquisition, Tom Cartlidge stated, “The new owners are good guys, Thomas Gleason from Dallas is in his early 40’s and in the oil business. Shane Egan, in his early 50’s, is an attorney and Jimmy Garza, in his mid-40’s, from Pharr, Texas, also owns Bebo Distributing Co., a major importer of agricultural products out of Mexico.”

Cartlidge continued, “Olsen-Stelzer Boot Co. is very fortunate to have new leadership who will be responsible for growing Olsen-Stelzer, in serving those who want to own historic, superior-quality custom boots. Our new investor group has the determination and business skills to take Olsen-Stelzer to the next level, so that we can meet the demand of this discerning market.”

Mr. Cartlidge resides in Henrietta to this day, where his passion for boots and his integral role in the company persists. Mr. Cartlidge will remain with Olsen-Stelzer as the company’s boot expert.

The newly resurrected Olsen-Stelzer continues this tradition and offers only the highest quality custom, handmade boots and accessories. These boots are ordered directly from the company, with delivery times currently at 8 to 12 weeks.

Carl Olsen said it best in 1906, “...I want to make you the best boots you have ever had, or that can be produced, from the standpoint of select materials, styles and workmanship!”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: One of the different logos through the years; It’s like taking a walk back in time with this Olsen-Stelzer ad; Olsen-Stelzer Employee Reunion Circa 1940; Another vintage logo; OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP DOWN: These black alligator boots with red tops are inlaid with the stone Corps Emblem and Semper Fi for a Medal of Honor Recipient; Olsen-Stelzer oil derrick boot designed by Carl Olsen, founder. Many of these boots were made in the 30s and 40s.



This continues to be the desire and intent of the Olsen-Stelzer Company.

They have opened a new Dallas location at 2911 Turtle Creek Blvd. Suite 1100 (by appointment only) and have plans for exponential growth.

It will be fun to watch as the next chapter of Olsen-Stelzer unfolds, with new owners and a new vision to carry on the heritage and legacy of this 118-year-old boot building business that started back in 1900 in Norway. The adventurous shoemaker, Carl Olsen, dug deep and decided to “Go West” in search for a better life. A life that led him to the America’s to expand his craft as a shoemaker into a cowboy boot builder, in where else...the cowboy boot capital of the world...Texas! ♦

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Boots for Warriors

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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Tom Cartlidge measuring Wounded Warrior Paul Bubliss for custom boots; New owners of Olsen-Stelzer: (from left) Tom Nelson from Austin, Texas; Danielle and Shane Egan from Dallas, Texas; Thomas Gleason from Dallas, Texas; Adrienne and Jimmy Garza from Pharr, Texas.