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Article Summary: The prosperous businesses of the Dietz family included lumber yards in Nebraska and a coal mining company in Wyoming. The couple traveled widely and accumulated large art and book collections. They generously supported Omaha institutions.

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Photographs / Images: Charles Dietz and his dog, 1914; the Dietz residence, 428 South Thirty-eighth Street, Omaha, 1892; map of the Nile Valley reproduced from *A White Woman in a Black Man's Country*, by Nettie Dietz; Charles and Nettie Dietz on board S.S. *Amara*, during their 1913-1914 Nile excursion; interior of the Dietz residence showing art work collected during the couple's travels; the library in the residence; the Dietz mausoleum in Forest Lawn Cemetery, Omaha

# Capitalism, Culture, & Philanthropy

## Charles N. & Nettie Fowler Dietz, of Omaha 1881-1939

By Oliver B. Pollak

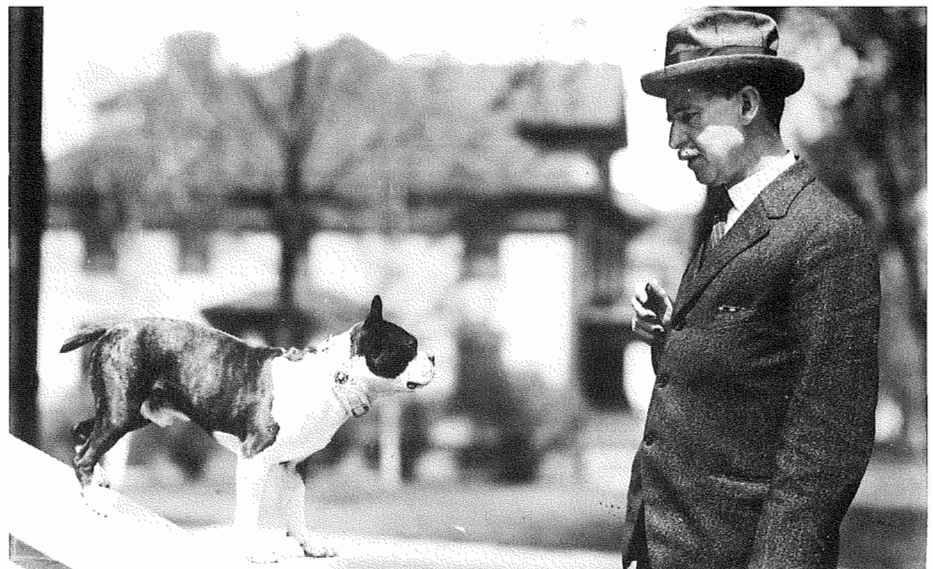
Charles and Nettie Dietz came to Omaha in 1881, where they developed a thriving lumber business supplying much of the state with building materials. With the wealth derived from his business acumen, Charles "retired" in 1903 and the couple pursued their passion—travel and collecting art and books. Although a cosmopolitan couple they saw the world through midwestern eyes. Their contribution to Nebraska culture was noted in their own day and continues to enrich us through their art and book collections at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha and Love Library at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Nettie's literary contribution, *A White Woman in a Black Man's Country*, can still be found on library shelves. Their legacy also includes two remarkable structures in Douglas County, the Dietz Mausoleum at Forest Lawn Cemetery and Potter's House, their former Omaha residence.

The Dietz family came to America during the eighteenth century and resided in Oneonta, New York, in the Susquehanna Valley. Gould Price Dietz married Lydia Ann Cooke, who died in 1849. He took as his second wife Leonora Antoinette Cooke, his deceased wife's sister. Charles Nelson Dietz was born in Oneonta on July 18, 1853, the second of six children. The family moved to Iowa during the Panic of 1857, traveling by train to Rock Island and then by prairie schooner about seventy miles to settle a farm in southern

Jones County, near the village of Wyoming. Leonora, particularly well educated for the time, supplemented her children's education with Latin and the classics. Gould gave up farming and moved about twenty miles west to Anamosa, where Charles assisted in running the family drug store. He soon demonstrated a flair for marketing.<sup>1</sup>

Dietz wanted to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, but he was two years too young to enter. His father, a trustee at Cornell College at Mount Vernon, Iowa, urged him to go to Cornell. When land grant legislation established Iowa State College at Ames, sixteen-year-old Charles was the first student to register in the first class of sixty-eight students, about thirty of whom graduated in 1872. Dr. Charles E. Bessey

arrived in 1870 to teach botany (he subsequently went to the University of Nebraska), and Charles assisted in teaching the class. He also worked in the treasurer's office and helped mark entrance examinations for which he received eight cents an hour. Upon graduation in 1872 at the age of nineteen he taught school in Anamosa, saved his money, and went to Chicago, where he briefly attended Rush Medical School. He soon turned his energy to business, working for a wholesale grocery company before entering the wholesale lumber trade. He weathered the Panic of 1873 and after eight years became a partner in the firm. He gained invaluable knowledge of the railroad business, especially rail car allocation and rate structure.<sup>2</sup>



Charles N. Dietz and his dog, 1914. Bostwick-Frohart Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum, Omaha-655-49

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## Charles and Nettie Dietz

Nettie Fowler Woodford, born in Burlington, Wisconsin, on October 30, 1860, moved with her father, Julius Samuel Woodford, to Nashville, Tennessee. Charles and Nettie married on July 21, 1880. In 1881, upon the advice and perhaps assistance of Jay Gould, a pre-eminent "Gilded Age" capitalist with a large interest in the Union Pacific, Dietz moved to Omaha to start his own lumber business.<sup>3</sup>

Dietz arrived in Omaha in April 1881 and opened the St. Paul's Lumber Yard, a wholesale operation, in June at Thirteenth and California. Charles and Nettie "toiled and slaved" for two years until the business was a "going concern."<sup>4</sup> His younger brother, Gould Cooke Dietz, joined as a shipping clerk in 1885. Success in the Gate City meant starting work at six in the morning and staying until after dark. Following a disastrous fire in October 1887 with losses estimated at fifty thousand dollars, the lumber yard rebuilt, changed its name to C. N. Dietz Lumber in 1888, and began to sell at retail. During one six-month period the company handled over six million feet of lumber and carried over two million feet in stock. "Put your heart and money in a Home" appeared on the business's outdoor signs, offering the "Lowest prices on all kinds of building materials." Dietz also advertised in the city directory, maintaining full page ads at the beginning or end of the book, and for many years the name "C. N. Dietz Lumber" was emblazoned on the directory spine.<sup>5</sup>

The business expanded to eleven locations throughout Nebraska including Aurora, Hastings, Kearney, and Lincoln. When incorporated in 1901 with Charles as president, brother Gould as treasurer, and Orange W. Dunn, the stenographer since 1888 as secretary, Omaha was the sole location. Branches were replaced by wider advertising and Omaha Commercial Club trade excursions to promote the Omaha lumberyard. Charles N. Dietz was a millionaire by the age of fifty.<sup>6</sup>

In the late 1880s Dietz expanded into the coal trade. The Burlington Railroad



**The Dietz residence at 428 South Thirty-eighth Street in Omaha, 1892.** Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum, Omaha-655-2B

reached Sheridan, Wyoming, and Charles and his brother, Gould, established the Sheridan Coal Company with Charles as president and Gould as secretary and treasurer. Along with their father they incorporated in January 1898 with a capital stock of five hundred thousand dollars, amended to increase to \$1 million in June 1902.<sup>7</sup> They founded the mining town of Dietz, Wyoming, with five hundred families, a post office, company store, Protestant church, Miners' Hospital, Union Hall, dance hall, pool hall, saloon, and two school buildings.<sup>8</sup> It was a "busy little town" with "all modern appurtenances; electric lights, a city water system, a club house, store, meat market, etc."<sup>9</sup> Dietz sold his interest in the Sheridan Coal company in 1903.

In August 1906 fire struck again, completely destroying the Omaha lumberyard, "one of the most complete in the west," including ten railcars, an insured loss of about \$150,000. Located at Leavenworth Street, from Third to Fourth Street, the lumberyard's siding could ac-

commodate nearly a hundred cars.

The business office was at 1214 Farnam Street. The yard was quickly rebuilt.<sup>10</sup>

Charles and Nettie built their house in 1892 at 428 South 38th Street, on West Farnam Hill, a district known as "the last capital of Omaha society." Worthy of a wealthy lumber dealer it had 3-by-16-inch joists under the main floor, 3-by-14-inch joists under the second floor, and 3-by-12-inch joists under the third floor. The nineteen-room home had ornate fireplaces, beautiful woodwork, glittering brass chandeliers, massive staircases, lavish bathrooms, an elevator, and Tiffany lead-beveled stained glass. The plans included a park with yard sculptures of life-sized deer and gnomes, where neighborhood children were welcome.<sup>11</sup> Periodically remodeled and updated, the house contained a museum, and the art covering its walls constituted one of the largest gallery collections in Omaha before the opening of the Joslyn Art Museum in 1932. University art classes visited the house as part of their coursework.<sup>12</sup>

Dietz hospitality was legendary. Generals John Pershing and Leonard Wood, Mark Twain, Herbert Hoover, Jay Gould, Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, Enos A. Mills, who wrote about the national parks and animals, and American and Canadian railroad entrepreneur James J. Hill were house guests, confidantes, and traveling companions. Autographed photographs hung on the wall. Helen Keller, blind and deaf and an early advocate for the handicapped, lovingly inscribed three of her books to the Dietzes.<sup>13</sup>

Although a lifelong Republican, Charles hosted Woodrow Wilson, supporting the president's internationalist position, perhaps because of his own wide ranging travels. Joseph Patrick Tumulty, Wilson's secretary, requested Dietz's support for the League of Nations. When Wilson campaigned in Omaha for the treaty, he diverted from the parade path to greet Dietz's mother, Leonora, who had previously been visited by Presidents Roosevelt and Taft.<sup>14</sup>

Dietz was known for his generosity. In 1908 Clarkson Hospital held a fundraiser; the average donation was between twenty-five cents and one dollar. Charles N. Dietz wrote a check for five hundred dollars.<sup>15</sup> He had a special relationship with the Omaha Public Library. Mayor James C. Dahlman appointed him to the library board and Mayors Ed P. Smith and Richard L. Metcalfe reappointed him. He served as president of the board from 1912 until 1930 when his health declined, and the board named him president emeritus. His last term ended in 1933.<sup>16</sup>

His generosity toward the library and its staff was noteworthy. Among his donations in 1908 were *Egypt and Nubia* and the *Holy Land*, exquisitely illustrated by Victorian traveler-artist David Roberts. In 1914 he covered printing expenses of \$228.75. When the state legislature passed legislation authorizing pension plans for library staff Dietz contributed in 1918 three Sheridan Coal one-thousand-dollar bonds, earning 6 percent interest, to fund the pension.

Other donations included 2,700 stereopticon views (a form of magic lantern for projecting enlarged photographic pictures), an alabaster of the Taj Mahal, and the Banks Collection of Babylonian Tablets.<sup>17</sup> On his death the board recognized Dietz as the "originator of the library employees' pension system, its most munificent contributor and always a loyal friend and counselor."<sup>18</sup>

The Dietzes, indefatigable travelers, loved the "Orient," and went to Egypt and Africa thirteen times between the 1890s and 1931. Once they were guided by Mahmud Fuad, future king of Egypt. Nettie's letters to her sister, Mrs. Nellie L. Hudson, "the girl I left behind me," written between November 1912 and April 1913, were later published as *A White Woman in a Black Man's Country*. Much of the book describes the Dietzes' excursion up the Nile by steamboat from Khartoum in the Sudan to Gondokoro in Uganda. Her observations reflect monied, midwestern, middle-aged views of race, Islam, Egypt, and Africa.<sup>19</sup>

The couple left Omaha on November 12, 1912, and sailed from New York on the S.S. *Berlin*. The first of the almost daily letters, written at sea and dated November 16, 1912, established familiar themes—weather (cold, windy, balmy, hot), food, travel companions, sights, and local color, a chronicle of pleasure and dissatisfaction. Nettie criticized the ship bands that played on Sunday: "I feel like our dog Punch and long to throw up my head and howl."

Algiers had progressed since their first visit in 1892. In Cairo "a lot of fine buildings have been put up," and Assuan (today's Aswan) had grown so much that it was hardly recognizable since their last visit. The pace of transportation and communications had accelerated. Cars sped in Paris and Cairo, steamers plied the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Nile, trains crossed America and Africa, and mail arrived quickly. The telegram, the "Marconi," and the belated arrival of the *New York Herald*, *Paris Herald*, and *Mail* and the British prominently posting daily telegrams to

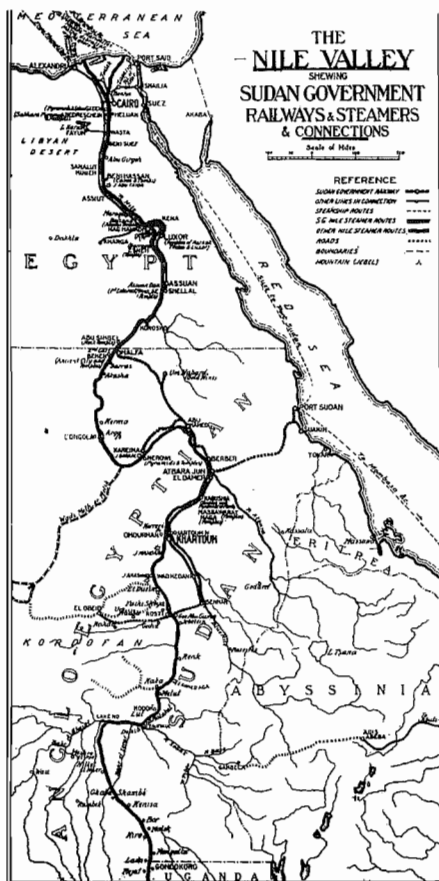
colonies kept them informed.

The Dietzes researched their trips, reading travel accounts, such as *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* by Amelia B. Edwards, Baedeker (the traveler's bible), and steamer schedules.<sup>20</sup> They prided themselves on evoking the envy of others by visiting out-of-the-way places. They wanted a closeness to "native life" not provided by regular tourist excursions. During the Nile voyage Nettie bragged about being the only white woman, other than missionaries, in Uganda for a thousand miles south of Khartoum. The distance from Cairo to Gondokoro by the Nile being greater than from New Orleans to Billings, Montana, added to the challenge. Travel agents had tried to discourage them from traveling to Uganda; it was too hot and the river was too low, even for steamers with a three-foot draft.

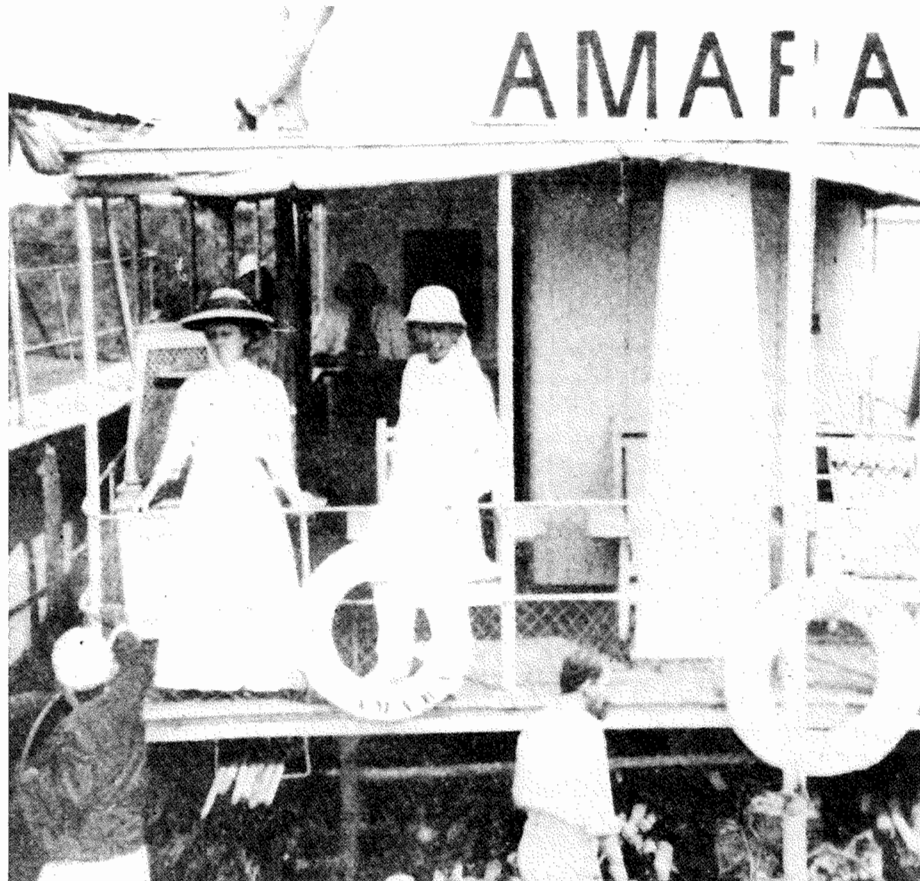
They stayed at legendary hotels, and in Cairo "were most comfortably fixed at Shepheard's [recently a location for the film, *The English Patient*] in the same suite of rooms we have had several times before." A big bunch of roses sat on the sitting room table. Nettie reveled in the gardens of the Grand Hotel in Khartoum and the Cataract Hotel at Assuan.

Traveling companions included merchants, missionaries, and British military officers on hunting expeditions with guns and "Kodaks." Nettie observed, "You know men are only boys grown tall and have to be amused." Charles contented himself with shooting "quite a number of pictures." Besides small talk the passengers jumped rope, played pranks, read, wrote, played cards, and ate.

Always fashion conscious and a proper lady, Nettie preferred her table companions in dinner jackets, dress uniforms, and long dresses. Appearances were important. Boats and trains had separate men's smoking and ladies' sitting and writing rooms. She repeatedly commented on the slack dressing habits of the English officers, an incongruous casualness for educated gentlemen. On the White Nile she was a "sea of perspiration" and Charles, succumbing to the in-



From *A White Woman in a Black Man's Country*, by Nettie Fowler Dietz



Charles and Nettie Dietz on board S.S. *Amara*, during their 1913-14 Nile excursion. From *A White Woman in a Black Man's Country*, by Nettie Fowler Dietz

tense steamy heat, discarded his coat, necktie, and underwear and left his "shirt unbuttoned at the throat." English officers had at least one servant, some as many as five. Nettie, disregarding Baedeker's advice that "a servant is quite indispensable," wrote, "We alone have none and I'm glad we don't have to bother with them." She did appreciate Arab servants who in "their white nightgown robes wait on us" keeping the boat delightfully "clean in every particular."

Food could be a consuming interest. Table arrangements, seating, silver, linen, breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner all captured her attention. The sound of "tea dishes rattling" prompted her to rise from her cabin to "partake" with other passengers in refreshments of tea, coffee, crackers, and delicious coffee cake.

She compared one lunch, three shelves of cold meat, to those of big London hotels, "most appetizing and attractive form — a real work of art." Food baskets accompanied their land excursions.

Great distance from home intensified the celebration of the seasons. They remembered the "real Thanksgiving spirit," St. Valentine's Day, and Washington's Birthday. They sent Christmas cards. Charles went ashore at Kosti, Sudan, and purchased some small mirrors and sleigh bells from a Greek merchant. Nettie constructed little treats and table settings with flags of various nations to make it "a bit like Christmas." While on the Nile excursion she planned the S.S. *Amara's* festive Christmas dinner of soup, gazelle with string beans, turkey with stuffing, boiled ham

and potatoes, asparagus salad, English plum pudding (which had been sent to the officers by relatives in England), egg and caviar on toast, fruit, and coffee. Champagne and cognac flowed freely.

Nettie compared the weather and the Nile to Nebraska. From Khartoum she wrote, "Sometime you may have encountered a Nebraska wind and thought it was bad—well it was not a circumstance to the one we are having here today." The Nile at Khartoum was three times as wide as the Missouri River at Omaha, so wide, in fact, that field glasses were required to see the shores. The White Nile, near Lake No, narrowed to about the Missouri's width at Omaha.

Fleas, mosquitoes, spine pads (to deflect the solar radiation), quinine, mosquito netting and boots, pith helmets,



and linen clothes were commonplace irritants and standard prophylactics.<sup>21</sup> Nettie reprinted the “Sanitary Notice—Flies” issued by the Khartoum Medical Officer of Health. The weather slowed her watch and swelled her feet. Ever water conscious, at home scorning Omaha’s dirty water, the Dietzes carried dozens of bottles of mineral water and “fizz,” soda water; ice was a rarity. Nettie sacrificed cleanliness to sensibility at Atbara, declining to leave the boat to bathe at the local hotel, although passengers reported it quite acceptable. When Charles went to Omdurman with a guide, Nettie declined. Not wanting to ride a donkey she proclaimed herself a coward; the spirit of adventure had limits.

Nettie’s sensitivity or sympathy toward non-whites dissipated as she took on a colonial persona. The terms Egyptians, Shilluk, Nuer, and Dinka mixed with frequent references to a “motley crowd of natives” and a “howling mob.” When distracted from letter writing by a funeral procession she wrote, it was “only a common one—poor fellow, maybe he was glad to go.” Her “great sympathy with the natives” declined “when the dragoman [interpreter] explained things to me [and] I saw that my sympathy was wasted as is frequently the case.” She adopted the colonial apologetic that “the natives say that they are happier and much better off than ever before.”

Nettie absorbed racial attitudes of the dominant colonial class. No British were aliens; Greeks were categorized with indigenous peoples. Her letters echoed some colonial sentiments as she recounted another traveler’s statement, “The only good Dinka is a dead one.” She preferred the Sudanese to the Egyptians. They were a much better, brighter, and “smarter looking class of people than the Egyptians and cleaner too, or it may be that the dirt doesn’t show so plainly on their ace of spades skins.” Sudanese men were better looking than the women.<sup>22</sup>

The women were topless, but “no one seemed abashed and so we were not.” She expected to “see men, women

and children clad in the suits they wore when born,” which along with scarification created photo opportunities. The application of castor oil in Nubian women’s hair was “altogether too complicated for me to attempt a description.” She marveled at Dinka use of cows’ urine to color hair red and brush teeth; dirt held no terror.

The childless Dietzes exhibited an ambiguous attitude toward African children: “The usual crowd of stupid looking native children were on hand.” The following of natives with gummed up, filthy eyes covered with flies were a nuisance while “half starved shivering dogs excite our sympathy so much that we share our meals with them.” Education was a mixed blessing for the “stupid looking lads” at a missionary school.

The American work ethic colored the Dietzes’ view of the non-Western world. The Dinka at Shambe were naked, “a lazy lot and rest often.” Teaching them how to work is “rather an uphill undertaking.” Women braided baskets, while the men spent most of their time asleep, the women doing what little work there is. A hotel manager shared his experience: “Yesterday was pay day for the garden workers and not one of them returned today to work and won’t until every cent of their money is gone. He says the help question here is an awful one.” The steamer passed fields of dhurra, the basis for flour and an “intoxicating drink that they love very much.” Nettie observed, “The blacks bringing it one bag at a time [one hundred pounds] chanted a sort of song which, made me think of the singing of the negroes as boats used to go out at Nashville, Tennessee.” Begging or “bakhshish” had almost disappeared, perhaps due to a government notice on its demoralizing aspects that Nettie reprinted.

Nettie recalled recent Sudanese history including the defeat of the “gallant” General Charles Gordon by the Mahdi in 1885, the imprisonment of Rudolf C. Slatin [Pasha], Charles Neufeld[t], and Father Joseph Ohrwalder, and General Kitchener’s victory in the Battle of

Omdurman in September 1898, a striking example of technological disparity.<sup>23</sup> On December 28, 1912, she stood at Kodok, formerly Fashoda, “a wretched looking place with only a few houses for Europeans,” over which in 1898 the British and the French almost went to war. On January 6, 1913, their steamer reached Rejaf, the “Lado Enclave,” formerly Belgian colonial territory. From there the Dietzes took a smaller boat to Gondokoro, just inside Uganda. On January 8, 1913, they commenced the return voyage.

Although Nettie Dietz wrote, “Each day I think ‘surely tomorrow I won’t have a thing to write,’” that tomorrow did not arrive. The Egyptian and African part of the trip ended as the *S.S. Adriatic* departed with the Dietzes, financier J. P. Morgan and General Porfirio Diaz, deposed Mexican leader, as passengers.<sup>24</sup> Upon reaching Marseilles they learned of Omaha’s devastating tornado. “You can imagine our anguish to read that Omaha had been destroyed by a big tornado, mentioning houses just across the street from you as being unroofed and friends of ours injured.” In Paris later that day, a telegram brought welcome news—“all living and well.” Nettie’s last letter, dated Omaha, April 15, 1913, proclaimed, “Here we are at home again after six months of the most varied and interesting experience it has ever been our lot to have.”

The Dietzes also traveled widely across America by car, train, and plane. In 1909 they replaced their span of mares with a chauffeured Locomobile. To go fishing in Wyoming and then Alaska in the summer of 1920 Dietz purchased the first all metal Larsen monoplane with “limousine body” that operated out of Ak-Sar-Ben Field.<sup>25</sup> In 1927 Charles and his brother, Gould C., travelled to South America, Africa, and Europe. Preferring warm climates Charles and Nettie vacationed in Miami and the Bahamas and toured in Texas, Arizona, and California.

Charles and Nettie Dietz were avid art collectors. The “Catalogue of the C.

## Charles and Nettie Dietz



The Dietz residence was filled with works of art the couple collected during their travels. Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum, Omaha-655-17

N. Dietz Collection” opened with a quote, “There is scarcely any influence so subtle, so persuasive and potent as that of fine paintings. . . . Wherever there is a picture gallery there is a center from which flow to home and families both culture and refinement.” Dietz felt public galleries and private collections should be placed within the reach of those who “cannot buy pictures of their own.”<sup>26</sup> The couple collected American, English, French, and German artists, some of whom they befriended,

purchasing during their travels and from London and Paris galleries. At least eighty-three artists were represented among their more than three hundred paintings. They liked pretty pictures by living artists, reminders of their travels, and avoided the more sophisticated choices that would have included impressionist and abstract art.

Not surprisingly, they had a strong interest in “Oriental” artists who focused on the Middle East, depicting ancient, Biblical, and Moslem scenes. The core

of the collection, over fifty paintings by August O. Lamplough, was set in Egypt. The “Catalogue” proclaims that Lamplough’s “erudity carries out to the minutest detail, poetic Eastern traditions. . . , almost photographic clearness. . . master of brilliant Oriental color and graceful oriental line and composition.”<sup>27</sup> Charles and Nettie Dietz considered him a “celebrated English artist of Egyptian scenes” and met him several times. By 1916 they owned twenty-three Lamplough paintings, two signed photo-



**Charles and Nettie Dietz's library.** Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to the Western Heritage Museum, Omaha-655-28

graphs, and an inscribed copy of his 1909 book, *Cairo and its Environs*.

The Dietzes met R. Talbot Kelly, who influenced Lamplough, at Luxor on February 16, 1913.<sup>28</sup> "This afternoon we had such a pleasant visit with that most agreeable artist, Talbot Kelley, [sic] and bought of him just the view we so often had from the Cataract Hotel at Assuan, up the river, over the little islands to the yellow hills across the river," a water color, *The Nile at Assuan* (now at the Joslyn). They acquired two books by Kelly, *Egypt Painted and Described* (1902) and *Burma Painted and Described* (1904), the latter inscribed "To Chas. N.

Dietz from R. Talbot Kelly, Egypt 1913" and now in Love Library at UNL. They met Kelly again in London in April and later obtained permission for Tiffany to make stained glass copies of three of Kelly's water colors for their Forest Lawn mausoleum.<sup>29</sup> Reminiscent of Talbot Kelly, who observed "dirt in Cairo is always picturesque," Nettie wrote, "You say Naples is dirty. Of course it is, but to me every one of her piles of dirt is picturesque and is there in the world such a location, such a bay, such blue water and such sunshine?"<sup>30</sup>

Dietz acquired seven paintings by Henry Holiday depicting Joseph in

Egypt, for which he paid about five hundred dollars each.<sup>31</sup> *Entrance to a Mosque* by Edwin Lord Weeks, "a painter of Oriental subjects exclusively," hangs at the Joslyn. The "Catalogue" notes, "This picture was hanging in his studio at the time of his death."<sup>32</sup> Karl Witkowski's *On the Banks of the Nile* completed their Egyptian collection.

The Dietzes toured Europe in the summer of 1914, accumulating more art. While in London in August 1914, they found some water colors by Miss Jessie Mothersole depicting Abu Simbel (Ipsamboul), eight hundred miles upriver from Cairo and the place most



## Charles and Nettie Dietz

Nile tourists started the return journey. The *Interior of Rock Temple at Abu Simbel, Nubia*, had recently been exhibited at London's Royal Academy.<sup>33</sup> Nettie echoed popular opinion, finding Abu Simbel to "be much more impressive than any of the other ruins in Egypt." The Mothersole water colors complimented a Lamplough painting on the same subject. Fleeing the continent at the outbreak of war they left paintings in Berlin and Paris to be retrieved after hostilities.<sup>34</sup>

Charles and Nettie enjoyed "picturesque" cultural survivals. Only the blind could ignore Egypt's enchanting colors. Statuary, tombs, and architecture were an outdoor museum. Other curiosities were maintained on a commercial basis. At Luxor the German consul, "who is a native," kept a museum "filled with false antiquities and has it so marked." Curio shops, or "native museums," were "filled with antiquities that had been found here or manufactured." On Elephantine Island at Assuan they visited the museum opened in 1912 containing a "really interesting collection of things found in this section and further down in Nubia."<sup>35</sup>

Charles and Nettie were clearly fascinated by Egypt and its funerary tombs, and they visited archeological excavations in Egypt and Pompeii. Their collection idealized Egypt, and their final resting place, the Dietz Mausoleum, at Forest Lawn Cemetery near the Mormon Bridge in Douglas County, reflects their Egyptomania.<sup>36</sup> Nettie took charge of designing the mausoleum and had several conferences with the architect. The result is one of the most interesting specimens of mausoleum architecture in the country. The style, inscriptions and windows are noteworthy. The Temple of Karnak and its interior tabernacle influenced the shape. The slightly slanted walls are typical Egyptianate. The lotus blossom, winged disk, and sacred asp carvings translate symbolically as "The Creator; God Over All; Destroyer of Evil and Death."<sup>37</sup>

They also held Islam in awe. "There is one thing you cannot help having re-

spect for—the Mohammedan and his religion. It makes no difference where he is—desert, street or reception—when the hour comes for him to pray, he prays regardless of his surroundings." They photographed fellow passengers praying, purchased a Koran parchment manuscript, and adorned their mausoleum with Tiffany stained glass windows of Talbot Kelly's *At Prayer in the Desert* (two Moslems), *A Nile Afterglow*, and *A Desert Scout* (on horseback).

Dietz, a bibliophile, had a collection of about fifteen thousand books that filled his large house, along with many others in storage. Agents from Thoms & Eron, reputedly the largest American bookbuyers, paid short visits to the Dietz collection. In October 1929 Dietz suggested a sale price of forty thousand dollars, spicing the offer with a long Charles Dickens letter. The timing was bad; the stock market had crashed. The buyer "is out of the market for it definitely now . . . having lost a fortune in Wall Street." When the agents suggested twelve thousand dollars for the collection, Dietz responded, "Just now we would not consider your offer of \$12,000 cash." He felt the market would rise again.<sup>38</sup>

In December 1930 Charles N. Dietz sold his interest in the retail lumber business to Carmichael Lumber Company, the wholesale portion to C. A. Tyson, H. B. Hudson, and Frank Gleason, and the coal business to Rivett Lumber and Coal Company for a combination of cash, shares in the new business entity, and notes payable. In early 1933 Charles and Nettie spent four happy months in Biloxi, Mississippi. After returning to Omaha his health deteriorated, and he could not make his usual trek to Ames to attend graduation. Charles N. Dietz died on June 19, 1933.<sup>39</sup>

Nettie Fowler Dietz died on January 14, 1939. In her will she arranged for the Society for Liberal Arts located at the Joslyn Memorial to receive seventy-seven "pictures, bronzes, ivories, marbles, porcelains, etc." that were part of the "Mr. and Mrs. Charles N. Dietz Loan Exhibit." She bequeathed about

one hundred paintings to her relatives.<sup>40</sup>

Charles's brother, Gould C. Dietz, the executor, proceeded to dispose of Charles's and Nettie's books. He approached the University of Nebraska about purchasing the library. Robert A. Miller, director of University Libraries, visited the collection, reporting to Chancellor C. S. Boucher that the eight thousand volumes emphasized literature and history. The university could offer five to ten thousand dollars, and likely recoup much of the cost by selling duplicates. Miller, recognizing competition for the collection, wrote Gould, "I am extremely anxious to do everything possible to secure the collection for the University of Nebraska and I hope you will advise me before you make a definite commitment to sell elsewhere."<sup>41</sup> Regent Dr. Arthur C. Stokes of Omaha (with whom Gould had travelled to Tokyo in 1934 to an international Red Cross meeting), Miller, and Gould discussed the sale at the Omaha Club on March 20, 1939. The university succeeded in purchasing the collection, although accounts of the number of books and the price vary: 8,000 volumes for \$8,000; 9,000 volumes for \$8,000; or 10,000 volumes for \$10,000. The books were shipped from the Dietz home to Lincoln April 13, 1939, insured for \$10,000.<sup>42</sup>

Among the prizes were incunabula (books printed before 1500) including *Life of Christ and the Popes*, printed by Anton Koburger of Nuremberg in 1481; Bibles from 1270, 1578, and 1610; a 1624 edition of Captain John Smith's *The General History of Virginia*; a first English edition of the Koran dated 1734; a manuscript of Lord Byron's *Don Juan*; and first editions of Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary and some fifteen works by O. Henry and Frank Stockton.<sup>43</sup>

Some books, including the two-volume index to the collection, were sent to Dietz's alma mater, Iowa State College. Unfortunately the index was deemed of "no particular value" and was discarded.<sup>44</sup> Sealed bids were received for the duplicates. The Nebraska Book Company successfully bid \$2,750 for 3,730 volumes.<sup>45</sup> Eighteen choice volumes went to



The Dietz mausoleum in Omaha's Forest Lawn Cemetery.

the Parke-Bernet Galleries in New York for \$237.50. Gould found a further cache of books in late 1939. Some controversy arose because of how little property tax had been paid on the art works because of earlier undervaluation.<sup>46</sup>

Charles and Nettie's prosperous business had drawn its strength from the construction industry and coal mining. They traveled widely and contributed to Nebraska culture through their donations of art works to the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha. The Love Library at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been enriched by thousands of volumes bearing the Dietz bookplate. Their mausoleum at Forest Lawn is a striking reflection of their and America's fascination with Middle Eastern culture.

The former Dietz home at 428 South 38th Street continues as an Omaha landmark. During World War II the nineteen-room house was converted into seven apartments for families of workers at Bellevue's Martin bomber plant. The

home had been subdivided into twelve units when the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the Regents of the University of Nebraska purchased the building for \$318,000 in 1989. The Children's Transplant Association and the Omaha Federation of Labor remodeled the house into twenty family units for transplant patients and their parents. Renamed Potter's House after the Biblical reference in Jeremiah 18, the Dietz residence is once again one of Omaha's best known homes.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Omaha Sunday World-Herald*, magazine section, May 17, 1931 (hereafter cited as *SWH*).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; *The Alumnus*, Iowa State College, July 1933, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *SWH*, May 17, 1931; *Omaha World-Herald*, June 19, 1933 (hereafter cited as *OWH*).

<sup>4</sup> *The Alumnus*, Iowa State College, Dec. 1924, 92.

<sup>5</sup> For the fire, see *Omaha Daily Bee*, Oct. 31, 1887.

<sup>6</sup> *OWH*, June 19, 1933; Articles of Incorporation, Jan. 9, 1901, K477, Douglas County Clerk's Records. See *Souvenir - Commercial Club Trade Excursion* (Omaha: 1905), and *Omaha, The Market Town* (1910 trade excursion to northeastern Nebraska), both located at Historical Society of Douglas County (hereafter cited as HSDC). See also Les Valentine, "Boosting 'Omaha the Market Town': The 1906 Trade Excursion Across Northern Kansas," *Kansas History* 15 (Summer 1992): 82-97; records of Omaha Chamber of Commerce, archives, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

<sup>7</sup> Articles of Incorporation, Jan. 13, 1898, J 66, and June 6, 1902, L 490, Douglas County Clerk's Records.

<sup>8</sup> Ida McPherron, "A Saga of Mining," WPA #1467, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Ketcham, "Donald Kennedy Recalls Old Dietz, Monarch and other Mines," *Bits and Pieces* 11 (Sept. 1977): 1, citing *Sheridan Post*, Mar. 14, 1901.

<sup>10</sup> *Omaha Daily Bee*, Aug. 11, 1906.

<sup>11</sup> Interview by author with Joan H. Galles, grandniece of Charles and Nettie Dietz, Jan. 14, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Forrest Sylvester, *West Famam Story* (Omaha: 1964).

## Charles and Nettie Dietz

<sup>13</sup> Inscriptions dated Jan. 30, 1916, appear in *The Story of My Life*, John Albert Macy (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1904) and *The Song of the Stone Wall* (New York: Century Co., 1910). An inscription dated Dec. 1929 appears in *Midstream, The Story of my Later Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1929). The books are located in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives and Special Collections, Love Library (hereafter cited as UNL Archives/Special Collections).

<sup>14</sup> Arthur S. Link, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 63: 93–96; *SWH*, May 17, 1931.

<sup>15</sup> *OWH*, Sept. 9, 1908.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes, Omaha Public Library Board.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* See also annual reports, library employees retirement receipts, Omaha Public Library; *The Omaha Public Library* (Omaha: Omaha Public Library, 1945), 28. The tablets are displayed in a glass case in the center of the main floor of the W. Dale Clark Library.

<sup>18</sup> Minutes, Omaha Public Library Board, Sept. 7, 1933.

<sup>19</sup> The first edition of Nettie Fowler Dietz's, *A White Woman in a Black Man's Country* (Omaha: Privately printed, 1914) consisted of 300 copies; a second printing of 2,500 copies appeared in 1926. The quotes attributed to Nettie Dietz throughout the article are from the book.

<sup>20</sup> *Egypt and the Sudan, Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1908, 6th remodeled edition).

<sup>21</sup> Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White, Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), 109–27.

<sup>22</sup> Her preference for Sudan over Egypt even extended to camels and postage stamps: Sudanese camels were white and did not have the moth eaten look of Egyptian camels. Sudanese stamps were veritable works of art while the Egyptian stamps were small and insignificant. Even the Nubian sand was "so much more beautiful than the gray lifeless sand of Egypt."

<sup>23</sup> See *Fire and Sword in the Sudan 1879–95* (London: Edward Arnold, 1896), illustrated by R. Talbot Kelly; *A Prisoner of the Khaleefa. Twelve Years Captivity in the Sudan* (London: G. Bell, 1899); and *Ten Years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp* (London: Sampson Low, 1892). The Dietzes were familiar with these books.

<sup>24</sup> For a fictional account of the senior J. P. Morgan's last trip to Egypt, when he would have travelled with Dietz, see *Ragtime* by E. L. Doctorow (1974).

<sup>25</sup> *OWH*, July 15, 1920, and undated newspaper clipping, HSDC.

<sup>26</sup> "Catalogue of the C. N. Dietz Collection," n.p.: typescript and manuscript, n.d., Joslyn Art Museum, citing *The Art Collection of the Crescent Democratic Club* (Baltimore: 1905). See also Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Culture and the City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), and Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> "Catalogue," 71–73.

<sup>28</sup> Lynne Thornton, *The Orientalists, Painter-Travelers 1828–1908* (Paris: ACR Edition, 1983), 252.

<sup>29</sup> See manuscript notes in *Egypt Painted and Described*, 228 and 238, in copy held by UNL.

<sup>30</sup> R. Talbot Kelly, "Out-of-the-way Places in Egypt," *Century Magazine*, Ser. 37, 59 (Apr. 1900), 903.

<sup>31</sup> Henry Holiday to Dietz, Jan. 19, 1917, Joslyn Collection. See also Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: William Heinemann, 1914), copy in Joslyn Art Museum Library.

<sup>32</sup> "Catalogue," 125. In 1997 the Joslyn presented *The Art of Construction: Elements of Architectural Design*. Among the pictures displayed were Holiday and Lamplough on Egyptian architecture and Weeks on Islamic architecture.

<sup>33</sup> "Catalogue," 90. The Mothersole paintings are in the Joslyn collection.

<sup>34</sup> HSDC clipping file, *Omaha Daily Bee*, Aug. 4, 1914.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Sattin, *Lifting the Veil, British Society in Egypt, 1768–1956* (London: J. M. Dent & Son, 1988), 252.

<sup>36</sup> See National Gallery of Canada, *Egyptomania, Egypt in Western Art 1730–1930* (Paris: Spademe, Adagp, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> *Park and Cemetery*, 29 (Feb. 1920): 309.

<sup>38</sup> Dietz to Thoms & Eron, Oct. 8, 1929; Frank R. Thoms to Dietz, Dec. 16, 1929; and Dietz to Thoms, Jan. 18, 1930, UNL Archives/Special Collections.

<sup>39</sup> Nettie F. Dietz to "Mr. Pride," Apr. 23, 1933, Dietz Collection, RS 217/58, Archives and Special Collections, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames; *OWH*, June 19, 1933.

<sup>40</sup> Will of Nettie F. Dietz, Oct. 11, 1935, probate record 463–396, Douglas County Court, RG 230, microfilm at Nebraska State Historical Society. The artists included Julius Adams, F. Angelvy, G. Augusti, F. Ballasio, G. Battista, Jean Beaudini, G. Bernini, Albert Bierstadt, Edmund T. Bode, J. Bonetti, Louis Bruck-Lajos, Elizabeth Gardner Bouguereau, Guila Cecchi, Paul Charles Chocame-Moreau, V. Corsos, Crochepierre, R. J. Dinning, E. Earle, Adolf Eberle, Antonio Casanova Y Estorach, Hugo Fischer, Fullo, R. G. Gilder, Norbert Goeneutte, William Hart, Joseph Heimal, Henry Holiday, Bonsai Ioka, Thomas Ireland, Aston Knight, Augusta Knight, Daniel Ridgeway Knight, Frederick Knight, August Krause, A. O. Lamplough, Raoul de Longpre, Bertha Lum, E. W. McDonald, C. Mancinelli, Frances Mumaugh, E. S. Paxson, William Merrit Post, Julian W. Rix, Kate Sadler, W. Dendy Sadler, Julius Scheuer, E. Schmitz, Prosper L. Senat, J. H. Sharp, M. Silva, Alphons Spring, George H. Story, Charles Stuart, William H. Trood, Wilhelm Von Dies, R. Holland Walker, Mrs. R. A. Willis, Karl Witkowski, Yokouchi, R. Yoshida, and photographs and paintings by Nettie Fowler Dietz.

<sup>41</sup> Robert A. Miller to Gould Dietz, Feb. 21, 1939, UNL Archives/Special Collections.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Hughes, "University of Nebraska Librarian would like to know," *SWH*, Aug. 13, 1939; *OWH*, Apr. 16, 18, 1939; Arthur C. Stokes to Miller, Mar. 15, 1939, and Miller to Stokes, Mar. 16, 1939; R. B. Saxon, operating superintendent, University of Nebraska College of Medicine to L. F. Seaton, operating superintendent, University of Nebraska, UNL Archives/Special Collections.

<sup>43</sup> Dietz probably paid ninety dollars for *The General History of Virginia*. The 1624 edition was listed in a 1985 antiquarian catalog for twenty thousand dollars.

<sup>44</sup> Charles H. Brown, Iowa State College librarian, to Miller, Mar. 20, 1942; S. A. McCarthy, acting director, University of Nebraska Libraries, to Brown, Mar. 23, 1942. UNL Archives/Special Collections.

<sup>45</sup> L. F. Seaton to Nebraska Book Company, Dec. 16, 1939. UNL Archives/Special Collections.

<sup>46</sup> *OWH*, Jan. 22, 1939.