

**Guide to
MS – 193: The Letters of William F. Dietz
to Ernst G. Laubenheimer**



(Musselman Library/Special Collections & College Archives)

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April 2016**

MS – 193: The Letters of William F. Dietz to Ernst G. Laubenheimer

(1 box, .27 cubic feet)

*Processed by Devin McKinney
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Bulk dates: 1900-1902
Inclusive dates: 1896-1915
Accession #: 2016-0085

Provenance

Gift of Nancy Hobor Dewing, February-March 2016, in honor of her husband, Andrew Dewing.

Biographical note

William Fredrick Dietz was a first-generation American, born to German immigrants in New York, New York, on November 2, 1872. Among his parents' acquaintances were Rudolph and Harriette Laubenheimer, likewise natives of Germany; their son Ernst was a year older than William, and the two became friends.

Enlisting in the US Army in February 1900, William was made an engineer. After training at West Point and the Engineer Corps School at Fort Totten, Willets Point, Queens, he was sent to the Philippines, which had been embroiled since the previous June in a war between indigenous rebels and US colonizers. Deitz served in Companies E and H of the Engineer Corps, building bridges near the cities of Calacoon and Angeles. His military career was cut short by illness: he was hospitalized with an abscess, contracted cholera soon after, and was still in the hospital when the war ended on July 4, 1902.

Following several months of recuperation, Dietz was shipped to a base in Benicia, California, and discharged in February 1903. After World War I, he worked as a foreman in a Wright Martin airplane factory in Long Island City, New York. He and his wife, Harriet, had two children, Elmer and Mabel. William Dietz died on December 1, 1948, and was buried in Long Island National Cemetery in Farmingdale, New York.

Scope and content note

This collection is divided into three series: I. Letters; II. Photographs; and III. Ephemera.

The bulk of the collection consists of 14 letters sent by William Dietz to Ernst Laubenheimer between 1900 and 1902. The first is written from New York in 1896, just after Ernst and his father have returned from a European trip. The second, sent from Atlantic City three years later, gives an interesting view of that fledgling coastal resort long before it became a major attraction.

The rest of Dietz’s letters are written from the Philippines in the midst of the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). He references his military work, but mainly gives his impressions of life in Manila, Calocoon, and Angeles. He says repeatedly that he likes the Philippines and has no desire to return to the US; refers to Filipinos as “natives” and predicts they will “civilize” rapidly if they only trust American intentions; and makes comments both disparaging and favorable about Filipino men and women. The letters contain many detailed observations – local dietary practices, geographical features, prices of items, rates of pay, etc. Later, Dietz tells Ernst of his hospitalization, and of his terrible experience returning to the US on an army troop ship.

The collection includes three other relevant communications. In March 1903, Ernst writes William to ask where he is. Weeks later, a letter from the War Department informs Laubenheimer of his friend’s discharge, saying his current whereabouts are unknown. Finally, a postcard sent by Dietz from Salem, Massachusetts, in 1915 reestablishes contact between the old friends.

Series II includes a photograph of Dietz from the time of his service, and three images captured in Japan, circa 1914. The latter are of unknown origin, and their connection, if any, with the Dietz-Laubenheimer relationship is unclear.

Series III consists of a sheet of Japanese newspaper, and a Japanese illustration. Provenance of these items is also unknown.

Box & Folder List

Box 1

1-0. Finding aid and biographical information

Series I. Letters

1-1. Letters from William F. Dietz to Ernst G. Laubenheimer, 1896-1902

- New York, NY, 7/23/1896
- Atlantic City, NJ, 6/5/1899
- Caloocan, Philippines, 9/25/1900
- Caloocan, 12/18/1900
- Caloocan, 1/28/1901 [misdated as 1900]
- Caloocan, 3/21/1901

- Angeles, Pampanga, Philippines, 6/2/1901
- Angeles, 6/17/1901
- Porac, Pampanga, Philippines, 7/26/1901
- Angeles, 10/14/1901
- Hospital, Angeles, 12/1/1901
- Santa Ana, Cagayan, Philippines, 3/16/1902
- San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, 6/25/1902
- Benicia, CA, 11/8/1902

1-2. Other Letters

- New York, NY, 3/18/1903 (Laubenheimer to Dietz)
- Washington DC, 6/1/1903 (E.L. Steeves, War Department, to Laubenheimer)
- Salem, MA, 8/19/1915 (postcard from Dietz to Laubenheimer)

Series II. Photographs

1-3. Photographs

- Cabinet card of William F. Dietz, Manila, c. 1900
- Arima, near Kobe, Japan
- Sedimentary rocks at Awoshima, Japan, 1914
- “Child & baby”

Series III. Ephemera

1-4. Ephemera

- Illustration of woman, with Japanese characters
- Issue of Japanese-language newspaper, hand-dated 1889

Subjects

Cholera—Philippines

Filipinos

Philippines—History—Philippine American War, 1899-1902

Philippines—Description and travel

Philippines—Economic conditions

Philippines—History—1898-1946

United States. Army—Military construction operations

For more information

MS – 191: The Laubenheimer Collection