

Finding Aid to the Charles Retzlaff Photograph Collection

Retzlaff, Charles, 1904-1970

Charles Retzlaff Photograph Collection, 1920s-1930s

52 photographic prints

Collection number: Photo 2070.538-543

[Biography](#)

[Scope and Content](#)

[Folder List](#)

OVERVIEW

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Deposited by Cass County Historical Society, 2005 (Acc. 2766).

Property rights: The Cass County Historical Society owns the property rights to this collection.

Copyrights: Copyright holders are unknown.

Citation: Cass County Historical Society Photograph Collection, Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo (item number)

BIOGRAPHY

Charles (Charley) Retzlaff was a native of Leonard, N.D, born there October 28, 1904 the son of William and Marie Retzlaff. They were immigrants from Germany, coming to the United States in 1904. He grew up on a nearby farm. In 1931 Retzlaff, the Dakota Dynamiter, began boxing professionally. He began in small bouts in Fargo and Grand Forks, but quickly rose through the ranks to the national circuit as a heavyweight. He moved to Duluth as his career progressed. His crowning moment was on January 17, 1936 in Chicago when he had a title fight with Joe Louis. Retzlaff was knocked out in one minute and twenty-five seconds in the first round, effectively ending his career.

Charles Retzlaff married Ella Ellig of Frazee, Minnesota about 1929. Ella Ellig was born Feb. 24, 1905 at Frazee, Minnesota, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Ellig. Charles and Ella had three children, James, Lois and Charles Stanley Retzlaff. After his boxing career in 1937 they returned to his farming interests at

Leonard. Ella Retzlaff died November 13, 1937. In 1950 he moved to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota where he operated an automobile agency. He died there June 4, 1970. They are buried at the Leonard Cemetery.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Charles Retzlaff photograph collection is a small grouping of images documenting his boxing career, portraits of himself, personal photographs of family and friends and autographed photographs he received from other sports figures. The collection was donated to the Cass County Historical Society and transferred to the Institute for Regional Studies to be a part of the society's photograph collection that is housed at the Institute.

The studio portraits of Retzlaff are both close-up shots as well as full-body views. One image is of him signing an autograph for a man holding a Duluth, Minnesota newspaper. Five of the images were taken by Tumler's Celebrity of Chicago. The photographers for the others are unknown.

There are nine photographs of Retzlaff in the boxing ring or wearing boxing shorts. One image is he with a young boy, likely his son, in the boxing ring. Another has him with a 'Young' Jack Thompson. There is a snapshot and two enlargements of two boxers in the ring and labeled 'Retzlaf – Gallagher, Schmeling – Stribing, Cleveland, Ohio, 7-3-31.' Many in the audience are also visible in this photograph.

The Family and Friends Series of photographs likely document family and friends in the Leonard, N.D. area, although none have accompanying written identification. Charles Retzlaff is on a number of images, likely with his wife, parents and siblings, on the farm at Leonard, N.D. and with friends. There are two nice images of Retzlaff and several other men with a large number of fox pelts hung from side of building.

The Autographed Series are of fellow boxers and others from whom he received their portraits. Included are images of Retzlaff with Al Joelson, 'One Eye' Connelly, King Levinsky, Chicago White Sox first baseman Arthur (the Great) Shires, 'Spud' Murphy, Lynn ? from the Chicago Cubs, 'Boomer', Charles W. Belanger, Art Lasky of Minneapolis, Minn., 'Joe,' Harvey Dullinsky, and Natie Brown

The final series contains a number of photographs in cardboard folders, typical of the 1920s and 1930s. Two are of Charles Retzlaff. One is dated July 1929 and the other was taken at Cliff Studio in Duluth, Minnesota. The only other photographs with identification si one inscribed 'To My Pal From Eddie' (taken at Lundquist Studio, Superior, Wisc.) and an other 'To Charley from Walt.' There are also two portraits of young women, one taken at McCracken Studio in Fargo, N.D.

FOLDER	CONTENTS (number of items)
538	Finding aid, and Biographical information
539	Professional portraits (10)
540	Retzlaff in boxing ring or in boxing apparel (9)
541	Family and friends (15)
542	Autographed photographs (12)
543	Studio Portraits in folders (6)