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University of North Dakota Alumni Association

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# Chester Fritz Makes \$1,000,000 Gift For New University Library Building

## *An Open Letter to Chester Fritz*

(EDITOR'S NOTE: February 15, 1958 will go down as one of the most significant dates in the 75 years of University history. For, on that date, announcement was made of the gift of one million dollars by Chester Fritz to create a new University of North Dakota Library building. The name of Chester Fritz is indelibly etched as one of the outstanding former students at the University of North Dakota. This issue of the ALUMNI REVIEW is dedicated to Chester Fritz. The story can perhaps best be told by reviewing some of the highlights of his life and his association with the University.)

CHESTER FRITZ



... gives a million dollars for the new UND library building.

Dear Chester:

On behalf of all the Alumni of the University of North Dakota, may I use this method of an "open letter" to thank you for your wonderful gift? It is the largest contribution ever presented to an institution of higher learning in North Dakota.

In reviewing the correspondence I have had with you over the past decade, I read again the letter received in February, 1947. It was the first information I had of your whereabouts since you left UND as a student in 1910. You had just arrived in New York by airplane from the Far East, via India and Egypt.

### Resides in China

In that letter, you explained that you had been a resident of China since 1915, where you were a junior partner in the firm of Swan, Culbertson and Fritz, and part owner of affiliated companies in Manila, Buenos Aires and Montivideo, Uruguay.

From then on the letters came regularly, with postmarks from New York to California, Biarritz, France to Shanghai, China. It was an exciting event to receive each letter from points throughout the world.

Though success is not measured in miles, you were indeed successful. I read with interest an article that had this to say 30 years ago:

"Chester Fritz has arrived in a big way. From working his way through school clerking afternoons and evenings in a drug store, to managing the American Metal Co. branch in Shanghai. Judgment, tact, nerve and foresight are required to buy and sell daily in the millions of dollars. Chester's success is due to the fact that he possesses all these qualities in no small degree."

CHESTER FRITZ



... age eight

### \$10,000 Contribution

But, though you lived and worked half-way around the globe, you retained a loyalty to your home state and University. In November, 1950, after you had contributed several times to the University Development Fund, a check for \$10,000.00 arrived with the following message:

"... my contribution affords me a certain kind of pleasure and genuine satisfaction in that I am now able to express my gratitude for the benefits which I received as a student at

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**1906 LIDGERWOOD FOOTBALL TEAM**

. . . champions, southern half of state in 1906. Top row, left to right: C. Bonzer, E. Bartik, L. Lynch, W. Parizek and C. Dawson. Center row, left to right: A. Macdonald, (Capt.); F. House, S. J. Sanders, (Coach); R. Movius, H. Movius. Bottom row: Chester Fritz and A. Bonzer.

the University of North Dakota. I have not visited the campus since my departure as a student nearly 40 years ago . . . This expression of my gratitude may be somewhat tardy, but, is none the less genuine."

The late John M. Hancock, another of the University's loyal and generous alumni, sent me a copy of the letter he wrote you regarding this gift, in which he said:

"I, too, have been giving my spare funds to the University for several years past, and my feelings about it are the same as yours.

"I feel that a dollar given to that territory will be spent wisely and that it will go much further than a dollar spent in any of our Eastern institutions."

**Student Union Furnishings**

Your \$10,000 contribution was used largely in furnishing the Memorial Student Union, which was opened for use in the fall term of 1951. I ran across a letter I wrote you just before the dedication of that building that may interest you:

"On Friday morning, I am to represent the University Alumni in turning our new Memorial Student Union building over to the University and the student body.

"Just 10 years ago, that plot of ground was used as a football field and as a softball diamond. Then, World War II came, and 167 of our boys gave their lives to preserve democracy and make possible the continuation of free institutions, such as the University. I can think of no more fitting memorial than a Student Union to our UND men. We shall never forget the important part that you played in helping with our financing."

**Honorary Degree**

In June, 1951, you returned to our campus to accept the University's honorary degree of Doctor of Laws in recognition of your achievements in finance and international relations.

The next year, when the University Development Fund was conducting a drive for a new swimming pool, for an artificial ice plant, and a scholarship fund, you pledged \$20,000—payable over a five-year period. When that time span was covered, you had exceeded your pledge by a considerable amount.

In 1952, President John C. West requested that you represent the University of North Dakota at the Sesquicentennial convocation at West Point.

While the University was continuing its post-war program,

your letters were still coming from all corners of the earth: from London at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, from the International Polo Games at Biarritz, France, and from the Winter sports activity at Lake St. Moritz, Switzerland.

On your visit to the campus in 1951, you were impressed with the progress of the University, but understood that there was a lack of scholarships for deserving North Dakota students. So, in 1956 you established the Chester Fritz Scholarship Fund, providing \$5,000 a year for scholarships.

**Largest Scholarship Fund**

Your contributions for that fund have now totaled more than \$100,000 to become the largest scholarship fund in University history. This year, five undergraduate students and one graduate student are attending the University of North Dakota with your help.

University officials are agreed that the trust set-up of your scholarship fund with the Guaranty Trust Co. of New York is one of the finest of its type.

The University of North Dakota Alumni Association last spring awarded you their Distinguished Service Citation "in recognition of your devoted service to the cause of education and for loyal support of your Alma Mater."

Last fall, your generosity expressed itself again. At a luncheon meeting in Minneapolis, President George W. Starcher informed the Alumni Board of your plan to finance a \$1,000,000 Chester Fritz Library for UND. The response from the board was overwhelming. Comments ranged from "Splendid!" to "The finest thing that has ever happened to the University of North Dakota."

The University has been growing rapidly in many directions these past few years, thanks to many loyal University friends. But the library facilities have been inadequate for our increasing enrollment and for our attempt to raise the standards of scholarship.

**February 15, 1958**

Then, February 15, 1958 arrived, a day of great significance in University history. On that day came the formal announcement of your monumental gift of one million dollars for a University library building.

The headlines of the local daily paper carried this caption: U GETS MILLION FOR LIBRARY

The sub-headlines continued: "Chester Fritz Donation Is For Building Only."

The front page story carried these paragraphs:

"A gift of one million dollars for a new library building at the University of North Dakota was announced today.

**FRITZ AT UND ALUMNI LUNCHEON**

. . . speakers table includes Dr. Elroy Schroeder, Grand Forks Superintendent of Schools; Mrs. Kathrine Belanger Tiffany, class of 1902, standing and Mr. Fritz. Mrs. Tiffany is Mr. Fritz's aunt.

**FRITZ ENJOYS TALK WITH WEST AND McDERMOTT**

*... discussing UND affairs are Mr. Fritz, former president John C. West and Edward McDermott, Chicago attorney and outstanding UND alumnus.*

"'Chester Fritz, international investment banker and former student at the University, provided the gift,' Dr. George W. Starcher, president of UND announced.

"He said construction of the new building will begin next year, with completion set for 1961. The new library will be built on a site between the present library and the law building.

"This is one of the greatest things that has happened to the University in its 75-year history,' Dr. Starcher said. The gift is the largest private contribution ever made to an institution of higher learning in North Dakota. It was made, Fritz said, 'in appreciation of what my native state of North Dakota did in furnishing the foundations of my academic education.'

**Thanks from Board**

"The State Board of Higher Education accepted the gift with sincere thanks and formally designated the projected building as the Chester Fritz Library."

In your letter to Dr. Starcher, you wrote: "I realize that a university library must also have the necessary books and other facilities for scholarship and research, as well as a functionally planned building; yet my contribution is for the building.

"It is my hope, however, that the State Legislature, alumni and other friends of the University will provide sufficient funds to keep the library well stocked with new-book acquisitions, including rare and unusual books of special significance to North Dakota, and with the most pertinent periodicals for the various schools and colleges of the University."

Your letter also expressed the desire that your gift "will enlarge the educational opportunities and the cultural horizons of generations of subsequent students at my alma mater."

In his expression of appreciation Dr. Starcher stated: "The Chester Fritz Library will become a monument to your ideals—not a cold silent memorial, but a living growing fountain of knowledge, wisdom and inspiration, made possible by your self-denial, hard work and foresight.

"A realization of the endless service perpetuated through your generosity must be a source of continuous personal satisfaction to you. The Chester Fritz Library will stand for years to come as a guide to the objectives you have always believed in."

Chester, you will be gratified to hear some of the comments that have come pouring into the University on the announcement of your gift.

**Governor Expresses Appreciation**

Governor John E. Davis stated: "It is wonderful to learn of this interest in the University of a former student who has made a success of his business ventures, and is now sharing part of it with our great University. It is extremely gratifying to know that an alumnus is so interested in the future develop-

ment of the University that he is making this cultural opportunity available to future citizens of our state. This library will be a lasting tribute to his loyalty to both the University and the state."

And, there were many, many more, including this statement from Durward Balch, president of the Alumni Board of Directors: "This gift to build the Chester Fritz Library is deeply appreciated by all of us interested in the University. It is the largest contribution from an alumnus to date, and . . . it is another indication of the strong loyalty and support for the University from its alumni group. It is also a recognition that the University of North Dakota is one of this country's fine universities."

From these sincere expressions of admiration and gratitude, we recognize that yours is surely an interesting success story from a small country community to international financier. I know it has been a long trail of progress from your birth in Buxton, North Dakota, near where your education began in a one-room school, through your high school work in Lidgerwood where you were graduated as valedictorian in 1908, to your entrance at the University of North Dakota.

**Eight World Trips**

I know that your experiences are like a modern day Marco Polo's, with your first voyage to the Orient in 1915 marking the first of eight trips around the world. I remember your telling of your 34 years in China, and of being interned in Shanghai when the Japanese moved into China during World War II.

This has been a long letter, Chester, but it barely skims the surface of your interesting life and the many thoughts which are going through my mind. Your enthusiastic support in helping us build our University has shown the way of leadership to all who would further the cause of education everywhere.

I sincerely hope that you will find it possible to return to the campus soon, perhaps for the 1958 spring commencement which will be another highlight of our 75th Anniversary.

As I reach the final paragraph of this letter, my gratitude on behalf of our alumni cannot be expressed in ordinary words. Surely the Chester Fritz Library will stand as a memorial to one who has paid his debt in measure overflowing, so that students in years to come may enjoy finer educational opportunities.

You have offered us a challenge and an inspiration. We shall do our best to measure up.

We extend to you and Mrs. Fritz our warmest regards and our sincere thanks.

Sincerely,

J. Lloyd Stone, Director  
UND ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

**MR. AND MRS. FRITZ AT ST. MORITZ**

*... Fritz enjoys winter sports activity in 1956 at St. Moritz, Switzerland.*

## FRITZ ATTENDS MEETING OF UND ALUMNI BOARD



... back row, left to right, John Hutcheson, J. Lloyd Stone, Loyde C. Thompson, Judge O. B. Burtness, Henry Lykken. Front row, Chester Fritz, J. B. Bridston, Helen Oppegard Stratte and the late T. E. Waldon.

## Comments on Fritz' Gift

**U. S. District Court Judge Edward J. Devitt class of 1935 of Minneapolis.** "It was my good privilege to learn of your plan to build a Chester Fritz library at the University of North Dakota. The University is badly in need of adequate library facilities if it is to maintain its status as a first class educational institution. Your gift is the finest thing that has happened to the University. I know it will advance the cause of high scholarship for many years to come."

## Alumni, Students, Faculty and UND Friends Laud Million Dollar Gift for New Library

J. R. ASHTON, *Head Librarian*—"Mr. Fritz's generous recognition of the Library's great need for space is matched by his understanding of the basic weakness of our collection. He has laid a burden of responsibility upon us to build a Library, new and more useful in every way."



RODNEY THORPE, *President, Student Council*—"I am sure I can speak on behalf of the student body in expressing sincere gratitude to Mr. Fritz. It is the unending support of men like Mr. Fritz that has made our University what it is today and make us proud to be students here."



C. J. HAMRE, *Graduate School Dean*—"The center of scholarship of a university is its library and an enlarged library with added facilities for study and research will open new opportunities to all segments of the university community—to students and faculty . . . . A new enlarged library building and expanded library services represent assurance of growth in size, expansion into new fields and increasing quality of the work of the Graduate School."



HENRY G. LYKKEN, *Minneapolis, Minnesota*—"Our Alma Mater continues to grow in size and stature. Your most generous gift of one million dollars for a new UND library is a giant milestone on this road of progress. I know it will prove both an incentive and a challenge to all our 41,000 alumni and provide untold benefits for generations of future students. It is a history making achievement in the annals of our University."

JUDGE O. B. BURTNESS—"Congratulations to the University of North Dakota and thanks to Chester Fritz for the magnificent gift of a million dollars for the new Chester Fritz library. Mr. Fritz has been away from the state and campus for many years. It is encouraging to realize that our high opinion of the University is shared by a man of the stature of Chester Fritz."



B. L. WILLS, *President, UND Chapter, AAUP*—"The establishment of a great library is directly in line with the aims and objectives of our organization, and we the members are deeply grateful to Mr. Fritz for his most generous contributions."