



Charles F. Iklé
1879-1963

Founder of the
Charles F. Ilke Scholarship and Research Fund in

The New York Community Trust
909 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

In 1963, the will of Charles F. Iklé established the Charles F. Iklé Scholarship and Research Fund, to be administered by the New York Community Trust to support research in the fields of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, sociology and other humane sciences.

"A connoisseur of life"

Charles Iklé was a man who could discuss the mechanistic conception of life with an eminent biologist, recognize Modigliani's genius before his works became popular, play the entire repertoire of Beethoven sonatas, paint competent landscapes, socialize with Ravel and a host of internationally-known musicians, invest his fortune so wisely that it enabled him to pursue his many interests, and withal maintain his position as an authority in his business and professional field: embroidery, lace and fine textiles. "He was," says one who knew him well, "a very rare human being."

Charles was born in 1879 in Hamburg, Germany, the son of one of several brothers Iklé (pronounced "ee-klay") who fanned out across Europe from St. Gall, Switzerland, home of Iklé Freres, the family textile manufacturing business. He grew up in Paris, mastering French, German and English. Shortly after the turn of the century he came to New York to open a branch of the firm.

Iklé had been in America only a few years when, during a long train trip, he met the daughter and wife of Dr. Jacques Loeb, the distinguished biophysicologist, who was then Professor of Physiology at the University of California. The width of a continent could not prevent Charles Iklé from becoming a friend and admirer of Jacques Loeb. In philosophic discussion of such matters as the problem of free will in the mechanistic conception of life, he held his own with the celebrated experimentalist, who was out to prove that



Aboard the Loeb's Crosby catboat *The Ossipee* off Wood's Hole, Massachusetts. Charlie Iklé, who usually took the snapshots himself, clowning in oilskin suit with a pillow stuffed inside. At the wheel is Leonard Loeb.

complicated life phenomena could be reduced to simple physico-chemical laws. He also became a lifelong friend of Dr. Loeb's sons, Leonard and Robert.

Charles admired the products handled by Iklé Freres. But, as one of his friends recalls, he disliked the business of business. Seeking release from its confinement, he traveled widely. Into his hands came some of the earliest silks woven in Europe, Coptic fabrics of the second and third centuries, medieval tapestries, and exotic silk fabrics from Sumatra, Java and Bali. And into his life came an almost incredible selection of the famous and the soon-to-be-famous on both sides of the Atlantic. "He had," recalls one close friend, "a love of beauty in human qualities as well as in objects and nature."

One day, Iklé's friend Kurt Schindler mentioned a man named Prokofiev. Would Charlie contribute to the expense of the composer's first American recital? Iklé had never heard of Prokofiev, but he loved music and he respected Schindler's opinion. He helped the Russian make his debut in Carnegie Hall. They had dinner together, and, Iklé wrote later, "In a few days he went to Chicago in an effort to have his opera, 'The Love of Three Oranges,' produced. To my surprise he

was successful. And to my still-greater surprise he returned to New York a few weeks later and presented me with a reimbursement of the money I had contributed to his New York recital. To this day that occasion remains the only time that money I have loaned to an artist has been paid back."

Early in the 1920's, Iklé discovered the Basque fishing village of Cibour, a stone's throw from Biarritz in the province of Basses Pyrenees. The beauty of the country won him, and he asked an architect to design a house. "I discovered that another Parisian was building nearby," he wrote.

To my delight, he turned out to be Jacques Thibeau, the celebrated violinist. My enthusiasm for having this musician as a neighbour came to the attention of the architect's sister. "Oh, are you interested in music?" she asked simply. I told her it was one of the mainstays of my life. "Well, then, perhaps you'd be interested in meeting a friend of mine who also lives here, Maurice Ravel." I leaped at the opportunity of meeting this man whose music I admired so much. This woman spoke to my spellbound ears of others who either spent summers there or at least passed through frequently: Prokofiev, Mischa Elman, Arbos, Landowska—all of whom I would doubtless meet and get to know. The anticipation of associating in this stimulating milieu foretold an end to a certain drabness which had crept into my life, and I said to myself, "Ah, Cibour, ou j'ai retrouvé la joie de vivre!"

Ravel's candid forthrightness and endless curiosity helped end the drabness. Of his famous Bolero, he told Charles: "Ah! It's the worst thing I ever wrote! It's a tour de force." And, intrigued by the American appliances in the kitchen of Iklé's new home, the composer "would stand in front of the opened refrigerator and slide the ice-cube tray back and forth in rapt fascination, or pass his hand around the interior, feeling the strange coldness." (Quotations from the unpublished notes of Charles Iklé.)

Pianist Robert Casadesus and his wife, the cellist, Garbusova, with conductor Molinari of the Rome Orchestra, became frequent visitors in Cibour and in New York. Politician Leon Blum, pianist Clara Haskell, composer Frederick Jacobi and pianist Irene Jacobi, conductor Enrique Arbos of the Madrid Symphony and his wife, the widowed Wanda Landowska, composer Prokofiev and violinist Mischa Elman—all stopped to see Charlie Iklé when they came to Cibour.

Iklé's ability to recognize future fame was uncanny. In Paris he bought Modigliani's "Jeune Fille au Col Marin" long before the painter's posthumous success. In New York he frequented the gallery of Alfred Steiglitz and selected works by John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Abraham Walkowitz. And more than one painter who never achieved their success benefited from the anonymous munificence of Charles Iklé.

When Iklé retired in 1929, he simply gave the business, in a characteristic gesture, to his associates in the firm. Having managed his investments wisely, he could now devote all his time to his interests in art, music, and the human sciences. His reputation as an investor produced one of the best illustrations of his sense of humor. An acquaintance, running into him in an elevator, said, "Mr. Iklé, I see you're always successful in the market. Can you tell me the name of a stock that is going up?"

Charlie Iklé looked around the elevator and said, "Otis always goes up."

A few weeks later he ran into his friend again. The man was jubilant. "I never had such a tip," he said. "I did buy Otis, and I made a pile."

The 1930's saw long summers at Cibour and long winters in New York. To handle his affairs, Iklé engaged a private secretary, Arie Fluiter, who became his devoted friend. He added William Glackens, Raoul Dufy, and the

sculpture of Archipenko to his collection. He attended lectures on the Egyptian Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, bought an Egyptian grammar, and began learning hieroglyphics. He frequented the concerts at Town Hall, Carnegie Hall, and the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium at the Metropolitan Museum. When friends brought children for tea, he treated the youngsters to an appetite-spoiling array of cake and cookie specialties, then turned them loose on a large chest of beautiful textiles in which they dressed and played. Inside him beat, said his friends, "a heart as big as a house."

The house that was his heart now seemed too big. Some time earlier, Iklé had bought a small farmhouse next door to his Basque home. Now he had it remodeled and moved in. He was there only for the summer of 1939. After France fell to the Germans, he gave the house to his caretaker, Auguste Sueur. He never saw it again.

Though a house had to be left behind in Europe, fortunate relatives escaped. Charles Iklé welcomed to America his sister, Amelie Lewandowsky, and her husband. With their daughters, Olga Warmbrunn and Clara Waldeck, they had made their way from Germany to Holland, then Portugal. The welcome included sadness: While Olga's husband had escaped, Clara's had not. It was typical of Charlie Iklé that he insisted that his sister and her husband move into his apartment.

In the summer of 1941, Iklé visited a farm in the Finger Lakes region of New York state. Though no more than a crossroads, the place had a romantic name: Venice Center. Its remote rural character appealed to Charles. "In a way he was spoiled and in a way he was very simple," recalls Mrs. Walter Rewald (sister of his niece Olga's husband, Hans Warmbrunn). "We had no running water in our house that first year, and he didn't mind a bit."

The next summer he bought Hilltop Farm, next door to the Rewalds. There, visitors such as Elsie Lumley and nieces Olga and Clara or Helen Loewenthal discovered that Uncle Charlie had marked out extensive pathways through the nearby fields and woods. They found him painting landscapes on the gently rolling hillside, or surrounded by his several English setters in the barnyard, or astounding them with his knowledge of the firmament as they stood at night under a vast clear sky. And he treated the students at nearby Wells College and Cornell to exhibits from his collections of paintings and tapestries, and to lectures which he illustrated with slides and samples from his collections of exotic textiles.

Winter evenings in the Iklé apartment at 40 East 83rd Street in New York brought a regular series of private chamber music and piano recitals by a group that combined professional musicians and talented amateurs. Such *soirées* included dinner or light refreshment, with exquisite wines chosen by a host who was a connoisseur. "Though everything was done with extreme taste, you weren't really aware of the food," recalls Dr. Robert Loeb, "because the conversation was so scintillating."

One who joined the musical circle after the war gives a penetrating picture of Charles Iklé in his mid-sixties: "He was not a good-looking man. But he had a bright, biting wit and he was a lot of fun. He was a very moody person. He could be difficult and egocentric. But he was a delight when he was in a good mood, and he had a good flair for interesting people."

During the '30's and '40's, Iklé had become a more and more familiar figure in the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Now he gave the museum two of his favorite possessions: the Modigliani and the medieval Swiss tapestry, which went to the Cloisters. Some professional members of the museum

staff found in him “the flavor of an earlier age of collectors.” He had, said one, “a real connoisseur’s spirit and eye. He was Old World to his fingertips—a connoisseur of life.”

The 1950’s found the elderly Charles Iklé, in the eyes of one who knew him, “a gentle, melancholy person.” There was still the love of music, but the mood swings which friends had come to recognize grew more pronounced. Yet those who ran into Charlie Iklé on a sunny morning on Madison Avenue found that he smiled through his depression.

He was 84 when he died. In his will creating the Charles F. Iklé Scholarship and Research Fund in the New York Community Trust, he remembered devoted friends: As consultants on the application of the Fund’s income he requested his longtime friend, Dr. Robert Loeb, and a more recent friend from the chamber-music recitals at 40 East 83rd, Dr. Michael Heidelberger.

There was a final irony he never knew. Nearly three years after his death, the Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art published an extensive dissertation by Vera K. Ostoia, Associate Research Curator of Medieval Art, on the Iklé tapestry altar frontal with scenes from the life of the Virgin. It established that the fifteenth-century tapestry was of German workmanship, made in the Upper Rhine region which did not come into the Swiss Confederation until 1803. Charles Iklé’s beloved tapestry had been German for 300 years before it was Swiss.



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