

## Edwin M.<sup>i</sup> Dawes



Born April 27, 1872, Edwin Dawes was the sixth child of eight surviving siblings born to pioneer parents Charles Mark Dawes and Minerva Sweet<sup>ii</sup>. Settling Maquoketa, Iowa in 1860, the family moved another 200 more miles west to Boone in 1867 where Edwin's father was a grocer. Charles would come to own mercantiles throughout the region, including a department store (lost in the Chicago fire), and had holdings as diverse as a factory for the manufacture and wholesaling of baking powder in Minneapolis. By 1880 when Edwin was schoolboy, the Dawes' crowded home included 3 older brothers, two clerking for their father, an older sister at home, a toddling little brother (Clarence), a newborn sister, and a young housekeeper, Sarah H. Watson<sup>iii</sup>. The Dawes' youngest girl, Mabel, would round out the lot the following year. The family, save for one brother, Leslie, seems to have left Boone behind near the turn of the century. Edwin's older brother and sister would move to California, while Edwin and two other brothers tended their father's Minneapolis factory (though California would be the eventual home of all but two siblings)<sup>iv</sup>.

In 1892, twenty year old Edwin arrived in Minneapolis, finding work as a clerk at Mather's Rest<sup>v</sup>. Before, or maybe during his time there, Dawes traveled to Pennsylvania, studying with William Lathrop and the New Hope school of American Barbizonist painters<sup>vi</sup>. He may likely have gone east between 1892 and 1897, possibly drawn by his mother's Pennsylvania roots. During the longest span of a single address in Minneapolis, he seems unlikely to have spent 5 years in "transitional" housing. In 1897, he married Julia Pope, of whom little is known except the date of her passing, April 29, 1938. Working as a sign painter initially with F.H. Rogers, local directories have multiple addresses for Dawes between 1892 and 1913<sup>vii</sup>. Charles died in December 1904, and is buried at Lakewood Cemetery, Minneapolis, Mn. beneath a simple plaque stating "Charles M. Dawes, 1834-1904, Sec. Lieut. Col. 24, Iowa Reg." Edwin, though listed in the 1905 city directory (when winter thaw allowed his father's burial) is curiously not among Lakewood's records of survivors present for his father's service. Minerva survived Charles by another seven years passing in December 1911, in the warmer climes of Long Beach, California at the home of her eldest daughter, Estella. Before her passing, Dawes wrote to his mother that he was a member of the local "attic club" and that he had been invited to exhibit with the Minneapolis Artists' league. He began listing himself as an artist in the city directory, though notice of his artistic talent is evident as early as 1905<sup>viii</sup>. The local press had also reported Dawes' star rising, noting the acceptance of a canvas, "Willows in the Spring" by the Chicago Art Institute's 1913 exhibition of American art. The paper went on to relate that "all summer Mr. Dawes could be found working along Minnehaha creek, putting on canvas the beauties of that picturesque stream so that Minneapolitans might the better appreciate the artistic value of their own beauty spots.<sup>ix</sup>" No known works by Dawes of that romantic landmark remain.

By 1914 Dawes was compelled westward to Nevada, Montana<sup>x</sup>, Missouri<sup>xi</sup>, and Arizona, where from 1914-1917 he completed four Grand Canyon scenes for the Atchison, Topeka

and Santa Fe Railway Company. A letter held by the family relates Edwin and Julia's travels throughout the Northwest, and to Glacier National Park in particular, where Edwin writes of having been commissioned by railroad magnate James J. Hill to paint landscapes there. Wilbur Dawes' reply to his sister's request for a means to reach Edwin bespeaks his itinerant lifestyle; "You ask for Ed's address which I enclose but it will probably be out of date by the time you receive it. They have moved twice since I received your first letter which was 60 days ago, but that is nothing, for they sometimes move twice in one week. When they lived in Denver they only moved 13 times in two years...they got the transfer companies dizzy they move so fast. Sometimes when they move into a place they change their minds so while one transfer company is moving them in one door another is moving them out of another." Dawes' artistic reputation however, seemed to take firmer root in California where his many siblings resided, and where Edwin would "settle" in 1915<sup>xii</sup>. He joined the California Arts Society, and exhibited frequently at no longer extant galleries - The Kanst in Los Angeles and the Ackerman in San Francisco. The LA Times and art serial entitled *Graphic*<sup>xiii</sup> had taken note of his growing California reputation. Both publications laud the success of Dawes' depictions, and list titles of works no longer known: "Minnesota Winter," "Budding Trees," "Sunny Morning," "Minnesota Birches," "Montana Sky," "The Gorge," "Sunset," and "The Arroyo," among others. The *LA Times* conveyed that "he has observed keenly and felt strongly," while *Graphic* noted "He is not waiting upon inspiration, he is mastering it." The latter article also quotes Edwin's aspirations; "there is a quality in nature which no painter seems to have expressed. That is the 'something' which I seek to present. I may never succeed in depicting it, but I am going to have a serious try at it. It is a joy to strive for it, even though one may never interpret it. It seems to me the trouble lies chiefly in the fact that the closer one comes to expressing an ideal, the further one sees beyond." A distinct change can be seen in his works of this time. Dawes seems to have adopted the mannerisms associated with southwestern artists such as those in Santa Fe, and Taos<sup>xiv</sup>. I can't deny a bias for Dawes' early and latest paintings, and had hoped that these incongruous works were misattributions painted by Donald Teague, a *Saturday Evening Post* illustrator of cowboys and indians who took to signing his work "Edwin Dawes" so that he could sell to *Collier's* as well. Unfortunately after viewing several and finding such Dawes congruities as lyric pencil-written titles on the stretchers, they're his. Colors become less naturalistic leaning more towards pastel, his vehicle is considerably thinner, paint is applied with less-heavy impasto, shapes are rendered more whispily. A 1923 Minneapolis headline doesn't mention the new direction his painting has taken, but does tout his "Work Bearing Out Promise of Early Years"<sup>xv</sup>.

The few known later works by Dawes synthesize his two distinctive styles. He returns to an encaustic-like application of paint typical of earlier pieces, while retaining the dissolution of form begun in his western scenes. "Evening," owned by the Weisman Museum in Minneapolis is typical of this description, wherein muted color suffuses dense woods. I've learned very little of Dawes' later life, and it is tempting to interpret such a work as a return to subjects he loved when young, or as the twi-lit reflection of some inner state. Yet he remained robust enough to remarry after Julia's 1938 passing; a widow listed in his LA Times obituary as Kate<sup>xvi</sup>. In that year, Dawes also leased his Nevada mining interests, and retired to California, active enough to complete his last

known work in 1943. Of the few hundred paintings Dawes can be surmised to have made, less than thirty are known to still exist. As a painter myself, the tired trope of an artist dying in obscurity gnaws. I hope to answer as many unknowns of Dawes' life as possible, and to restore the regard that his moving works merit.

Tim White, Minneapolis, 4.26.03

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<sup>i</sup> Most bibliographies list Dawes' middle name as Munott. A genealogical study of eight generations of Dawes' beginning with Adrian Dawes of Nottinghamshire cites Edwin's middle name as Minot. [dawesbiz.net/genealogy/index.html](http://dawesbiz.net/genealogy/index.html).

<sup>ii</sup> Charles (born 1834) of Royalton, Niagara Co., NY, married Minerva Sweet (born 1838) also of Royalton, June 29, 1859 in New York State. They soon emigrated West to Maquoketa, Iowa, where their first son, Wilbur, was born April 18, 1860 (It seems implicit that Minerva must have been considerably pregnant during the journey to Iowa). Charles and Minerva would have nine children, eight of whom survived to adulthood.

<sup>iii</sup> Iowa Census, Second Ward, Boone, 1880.

<sup>iv</sup> *Dawes Family Newsletter*, July 1972. The late philanthropist, Iowa emigree, and Latin American Scholar E. Bradford Burns would later provide The family's home state a posthumous homecoming by donating two beautiful works by Edwin to the Muscatine Art Center.

<sup>v</sup> The boarding house at 21 West Grant, listed as Dawes' Minneapolis address from 1892-1897 has been replaced by an inauspicious hi-rise condominium. Among the addresses listed in endnote vii, the Hawthorne Avenue address is gone but surrounded by period brownstones, and the Meyers arcade is now a downtown Minneapolis Target store.

<sup>vi</sup> Zenobia B. Ness: *Iowa Artists of the First Hundred Years*.

<sup>vii</sup> Dawes listed businesses and residences at the following: Mather's Rest, 21 West Grant (1892)-222 Hennepin (1897)- "signs" 304 Nicollet Avenue and rooms at 314 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street (1900)- "painter" 611 First Avenue South with rooms at 1515 Hawthorn (sp.) (1903)- "painter" 503 ½ Hennepin Avenue-basement flat at 912 Sixth Avenue South (1905)- "painter" 503 ½ Hennepin Avenue, rooms b flat 3, 20 North Twelfth (1907)- "painter" 503 ½ Hennepin, rooms at the Hotel Landour (1909)- "artist" 318 Meyers Arcade, rooms 3337 First Avenue South (1911)- "artist" 318 Meyers Arcade, rooms 69 South Eleventh.

<sup>viii</sup> Minnesota State Art Society, 1905, 1909 (prize), 1913 (gold), 1914 (prize); Saint Paul Art Institute, 1915 (medal), from *Who Was Who in American Art*.

<sup>ix</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1913 p. 15; also cites a current Dawes exhibition at the Meyers Arcade, including one painting of the summer home of a C.G. Goodrich.

<sup>x</sup> A Dawes Montana subject "Dawn in the Sweet Grass Mountains" is purportedly owned by the Owatonna Public Library, which has not yet found record of having had the work or of having deaccessioned it.

<sup>xi</sup> Two oil paintings, a mountain scene and "Birches in the Wildwood" were found in Carthage, Missouri (the latter, sold to Kramer Gallery, St. Paul, 1981).

<sup>xii</sup> *Dawes family Newsletter*, July, 1972.

<sup>xiii</sup> Bibliography from an unknown source: "Biog., *Graphic*, March 27, 1915, p.13, col.3 and p.15, col.1-2; ann. of ex. at Kanst, *LAT*, April 4, 1915, 3-17-2; brief review of ex. at Kanst, *Graphic*, April 10, 1915, p.15 col.3; port. and review of ex. at Kanst, *LAT*, April 11, 1915, 3-15-1,2; expresses his opinion of California, *Graphic*, May 8, 1915, p.12, col.1-2; returns to LA after sojourn in N.Y. and Minneapolis, *LAT*, October 28, 1917, 3-16-15; review of ex. at Kanst, *LAT*, April 14, 1918, 3-22-5,6; exhibited locally PSCA No.2."

<sup>xiv</sup> This change is jarringly evident on a fledgling website devoted to Dawes at: [geocities.com /smitty\\_26 /Dawes.htm](http://geocities.com/smitty_26/Dawes.htm).

<sup>xv</sup> *The Minneapolis Journal*, October 14, 1923, p.4 records the remembrance of an avid patron who availed himself of a sneak peek at Dawes' first Minneapolis exhibition, without the artist's knowledge.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1945, 2-2-6,7. Identified as Kate Applehaus (e-mail from Dan Kangley, 4.28.03)