



Wedding Guide 1986

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'Milk of human kindness' yields unexpected legacy from 'pauper'

By Teresa A. Parsons

Having their milk delivered was a luxury the sisters at Holy Angels Convent in Irondequoit could ill afford. But because they believed that their milkman needed the business, they never canceled the service.

Last week their charity paid off. The sisters were stunned to learn that their apparently penniless milkman had left an estate worth at least half a million dollars. They were even more surprised by the news that he had named them, along with St. Michael's Church in Rochester, among his beneficiaries.

William E. Hoff, 63, was shot to death during what appeared to be a robbery attempt at his apartment on Rochester's west side December 28. Police have charged three city men in connection with the shooting.

Although Hoff slept on the floor in the kitchen of an apartment building and dressed like a pauper, family members turned up bank books and other records after his death that revealed he had close to half a million dollars in the bank and apparently owned thousands of shares of stock.

An initial value of \$50,000 was placed on Hoff's estate when his will was filed in Monroe County Surrogate Court last week. The court does not require that an inventory of Hoff's assets be filed for six months, according to Seymour Weinstein, the lawyer for Hoff's estate.

In his will, Hoff directed that his estate be divided equally among six nieces and nephews, St. Michael's Church on North Clinton Avenue, and the Holy Angels Convent, operated by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity on North Winton Road.

Hoff was an enigma to most who knew him. On one hand, police reported he sold wine and cashed welfare checks for a profit, from the apartment house where he lived. But at the same time, neighbors and customers remember him as a kind, soft-spoken, even religious man who went out of his way to help others.

As a subcontractor for Upstate Milk Cooperative, Hoff delivered dairy products to several dozen customers, including St. Michael's and Holy Angels.

Sister Mary Helen Garrity, superior of the Holy Angels community, heard about Hoff's death in a television news report.

"When they said he was a wealthy man, we said, 'Oh, that couldn't be our Bill Hoff,'" she recalled. "I could hardly believe it when we found out it was him."

Judging by his shabby wardrobe and the battered station wagon Hoff drove, the sisters considered him poor. Once, they gave him a winter coat to replace the tattered one he held together with safety pins.

Hoff's generosity at Christmas and Easter was the sisters' only indication that he wasn't destitute. When the sisters gave Hoff \$10, he usually left them \$10 and a card in return.

"He was always very respectful, gentle and

kind, very simple in his ways," Sister Mary Helen said. "He seemed to love to talk to the sisters when he was there. He'd always say things like 'God bless you' or 'I'll remember you in my prayers.' Something in his demeanor alone made you feel that he was close to God."

Hoff's connection with St. Michael's was slightly more substantial. His father, Edward, was a lifelong parishioner at the church and once operated a dairy on Rochester's northeast side, according to his only surviving son, Herbert Hoff, 71.

For as long as David Wedow, the parish's business administrator, can remember, William Hoff delivered milk to the church rectory.

"He was a delightful, quiet man," Wedow said. "He would never bug us if we were behind with our bill. He would just write out how much we owed and leave it at that."

Parish organist Lillian Karnes grew up across the street from the Hoff family's dairy. She never knew William Hoff well, but would exchange greetings and casual banter with him every Saturday when he dropped off the milk.

"He was a mystery figure to everyone," she said. "He never talked about where he lived or what he did. We'd just talk about the weather. He was just a very pleasant man."

As of Monday, no one at either St. Michael's or Holy Angels had been officially notified of Hoff's bequests. Nor are they sure why he chose them as beneficiaries. But there is no doubt that the money will be useful.

Established in 1930, Holy Angels was home to hundreds of wayward or unwanted young women before increasingly strict state regulations forced it to close in 1975.

"They wanted us to do certain things, but they wouldn't pay for them and we had no money," recalled Sister Mary Helen, who has been at Holy Angels for 54 years. "We miss the girls so much. But some of them still come back to visit with their children. We like to call them our grandchildren."

The sisters, who were a semi-clostered order prior to the Second Vatican Council, today practice an apostolate of prayer and depend on donations for their support.

Two of the seven elderly women who remain at the Winton Road convent are currently hospitalized — one suffering from cancer and the other from the effects of a stroke. A third now lives at the Sisters of St. Joseph Infirmary on East Avenue.

"We will probably use the money to help with our expenses," Sister Mary Helen said. So will St. Michael's, which, like many inner-city parishes, is constantly struggling to make ends meet. Each winter, tens of thousands of dollars are needed just to heat the huge sanctuary.

"In the gospel of John, it says 'where your treasure is, so is your heart,'" said Wedow. "Mr. Hoff has done a lot for people."

Kearney theatre guild slates fourth production

A bit of tradition returns to Irondequoit this month as the Bishop Kearney Theatre Guild's production of "Fiddler on the Roof" takes center stage.

"Fiddler on the Roof," a smash Broadway musical, includes such classics as "If I Were a Rich Man," "Sunrise, Sunset" and "Tradition."

Performances of "Fiddler on the Roof" will be Saturday, Jan. 31 at 8 p.m.; Sunday, Feb. 1 at 2 p.m.; Friday, Feb. 6 at 8 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 7 at 9 p.m.; and Sunday, Feb. 8 at 2 p.m. Performances will be held at the

Annual antique sale planned by Mercy Alumnae Association

The Alumnae Association of Our Lady of Mercy High School will hold its ninth annual antique show and sale at the school, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester, on Saturday and Sunday, January 24 and 25, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Homemade lunches and baked goods will be available both days. The donation at the door is \$1.50.

Weekend retreat for women set

"The Need for Hope" is the theme for a retreat for women scheduled for the Notre Dame Retreat House. The weekend retreat will be offered January 23-25.

For information or registration, write the retreat house at P.O. Box 342, Canandaigua, 14424, or call (716)394-5700.

Bishop Kearney High School Theater, 125 Kings Highway South, Irondequoit.

Tickets may be purchased in advance for \$6, by contacting Bishop Kearney High School, or Kate Schiefen at 338-1070. Discount counts are available for groups of more than 20 persons. Admission at the door will be \$7.

Full-, part-time help needed at Rochester's Bethany House

Bethany House, a Catholic worker house of hospitality, is currently in need of full-time and part-time staff members. Bethany House provides temporary shelter to women and children in crisis. A small stipend and medical benefits will be provided. Hours can be flexible.

Those interested in sharing in the ministry to homeless women and children should contact Donna Ecker or Liz Bearsto at (716)454-4197.

Annual 'Italian Night' slated

The Parents Club of McQuaid Jesuit High School will present its annual "Italian Night" on Saturday, January 24, in the cafeteria of the school, 1800 S. Clinton Ave., Rochester.

Advance paid reservations are required. The price of admission is \$10. Because tickets are in limited supply, they will not be sold at the door. Tables may be reserved for a maximum of eight people. Call (716) 473-1130 for information.