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Public Opinion (Chambersburg, PA)

December 12, 2008

Section: Local

Donald Berkebile was well-known in museum circles

Staff report

Donald H. **Berkebile** was a Johnstown native, graduate of Johnstown High School, Columbia Union College in Washington and the University of Pittsburgh. He went into the Army soon after graduating from high school and served two years from 1945 to 1946. He worked at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., from 1955 to 1981.

During his career at the Smithsonian, he built scale models and restored specimens in the museum's exhibits department. In 1961, he was promoted to museum specialist of the Smithsonian's transportation department.

He was also an active collector of antiques. At one time he restored an 1860s Beckley Wagon built by Henry Beckley of St. Clairsville and donated it to the Smithsonian.

Both during and after his retirement, he was a consultant to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich., and the Stoney Brook Museum in New York.

Eleven years before his retirement, he and his wife Winifred bought a 1700s stone farmhouse and just over three acres of land in Montgomery Township near Mercersburg from the late J. Robert and his wife, Julia B. Grove. Winifred **Berkebile** died in 1997.

After his retirement, **Berkebile** continued to buy and restore antiques and renovated that 14-room farmhouse, filling it with period antiques.

For almost a decade before his death last summer, **Berkebile** was involved in a dispute with Julia Grove over what he considered a dangerous practice of using biosolids as fertilizer on Grove's adjacent farm.

He and Grove were also involved in a property dispute. The executors of his estate had **Berkebile's** farm surveyed recently, and a corrected deed filed Dec. 2 in the Franklin County Courthouse shows redrawn boundaries giving about a third of an acre of land on the east side of the **Berkebile** property to Grove and a smaller section on the northwest side to another neighbor, Rick Hege.

The **Berkebile** farm gained a smaller piece of land on the southeast side of the property.

The Berkebiles had no children. His will directed that proceeds from the sale of the property and furnishings be divided among several charities after several small bequests were fulfilled and executors of his estate were paid.

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