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Public Opinion (Chambersburg, PA)

October 19, 2008

Section: Local

Berkebile collection is 'auctioneer's dream'

VICKY TAYLOR Staff writer

Five charities will share in the proceeds from Donald H. **Berkebile**'s estate, according to the terms of the Montgomery Township man's will.

The 81-year-old childless widower who died in a fight with a neighbor in July had been a curator at the Smithsonian Institute before his retirement in 1981 and collected and restored a house and barn full of antiques on Blue Spring Road.

Auctioneer Matt Hurley, who is handling the sale of **Berkebile**'s antiques and early American memorabilia, called the collection an auctioneer's dream.

"We are really excited," Hurley said of the upcoming multiple-day auction on the last three days of this month. "We just don't get this kind of opportunity every day."

The collection includes early American furniture, antique woodworking equipment and items like a restored Conestoga wagon and an old high-wheel "Penny Farthing" bicycle.

Berkebile left a detailed will, ordering his three executors to sell everything he had and, with the exception of a few small bequests, distribute the proceeds among the Humane Society of the United States, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the World Wildlife Fund, the National Wildlife Fund and the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind.

Those bequests will be distributed after the three men named as executors are each paid 5 percent for their work and the three smaller bequests are fulfilled. The Humane Society of the U.S. and the World and National Wildlife Foundations will each get 10 percent of the proceeds. ASPCA and the Guide Dog Foundation will each get 35 percent.

Berkebile's will reflects his attention to detail, a characteristic that helped him succeed as both a curator at the Smithsonian and a restorer of antiques.

In addition to outlining specifically how he wanted his estate handled and divided, it gave details about how his burial was to be handled.

In the will, **Berkebile** gave instructions to one of his executors, Dave Hornbaker of Mercersburg, about the location of his primitive, hand-made casket (in the wagon shed) and asked Hornbaker to consult a book, "Caring for the Dead," which was to be found in the living room on the shelf over the door.

He asked that he be buried next to his wife in Lancaster County within 24 hours of his death without the assistance of an undertaker, with no preparation, viewing or service. It is unknown if it was possible for those preparations to be carried out, since the nature of his death required an autopsy.

A codicil dated Feb. 27, 2001, gives \$5,000 to Claire Cole and her sister Kris, and an addition to the codicil dated Feb. 2, 2006, gives Jim Wolford of Wasilla, Ala., **Berkebile**'s percussion pistol and a Walker replica, and adds "an extra gift goes with the Walker. Shipping charges from my estate."

Hurley said **Berkebile**'s 1700s stone farmhouse on Blue Spring Road was almost like a museum. Each bedroom was furnished in a theme, right down to clothing in the closets and shoes that would have been worn in that time period.

"It's like going back in time," he said. "It's as if people had left the house 200 or more years ago, shut the door and just never came back."

News of the auction has drawn inquiries from collectors all over the country, and as far away as Alaska, he said.

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Photo:

High ride: An old high-wheel "Penny Farthing" bicycle is among several unusual items in Donald **Berkebile**'s estate up for auction. **Berkebile** is seen here riding his bike many years ago.

Photo:

[Red engine: Antique toys are also to be auctioned.](#)

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