



Helen B. Gaither - *Philanthropy*

Kind, loyal, gracious, but shy during her lifetime, Helen Brown Gaither made her most dramatic impact on several local organizations with the bequests she made to them from her estate of over \$3.7 million.

A life member of Oglebay Institute, about one-half of her estate went to that organization for the benefit of the Stifel Fine Arts Center. Gaither hoped her bequest would be used for fine arts programming and the institute dedicated the money to the Stifel's exhibit season, which each year is now named the Helen B. Gaither Exhibition Season. The ongoing season customarily involves nine to 12 exhibits at the Hart Galleries at Stifel Fine Arts Center.

A quarter of Gaither's estate was bequeathed to Ohio Valley Medical Center for its various programs.

The remainder of the estate was evenly divided between the Ohio County Public Library and St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, both in Wheeling. The library placed the bequest in its endowment trust where it is used primarily for educational purposes, especially purchase of library materials. St. Matthew's used its funds from Gaither for its music program.

The honoree was born on Nov. 19, 1900, in Baltimore, Md., the daughter of Lucy Brown Gaither and Walter Thomas Gaither. She was never married and spent most of her life in her family home at 17 Walnut Ave. in Wheeling's Woodsdale neighborhood. She died on June 14, 1996. She is survived by several cousins. An only child whose father died before Helen was born, she lived with her mother and her mother's sisters and attended Miss Bertha's School in Wheeling and then was educated in New York where an aunt was a physician. Gaither may have earned a teaching certificate and an offer of a teaching post, but she never was employed as a teacher, according to a family friend. She was, however, a respected educator in the field she loved most, the breeding of Gaidoune Scottish Terriers.

Gaither was well-known among breeders of Scottish terrier dogs around the country for her national champions. The shelves in her home were laden with silver trophies and ribbons her Scotties had won at national shows. She also conducted a grooming business for dogs at her home, and worked very closely with Dr. Nancy Caldwell Lenfesty at the Silver Ho Kennels.

Gaither was a long-time member of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church and was a member of Oglebay Institute from 1937 until her death in 1996.

Her kindness reportedly was extended to everyone she befriended. "Whenever there were sick friends and neighbors, you would find Helen in the kitchen, cooking and packaging food that she would deliver to those in need," a friend recalled. She was famous for her home-made Christmas cookies and chocolate Scotties that she would decorate with colorful paper, wrap and send over the holidays.

Another friend described Gaither as "a very humble, dignified, independent, free spirited, generous, witty and loyal individual, who thought of herself as being just ordinary."

"Helen was kind, but she was very, very shy," neighbor and family friend Rosemary Front recalled. "It's a shame that she didn't allow people to get to know her. She was a really neat lady. She also was one of the smartest people I ever knew. She read The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal every day as well as the News-Register and The Intelligencer from here in Wheeling," Front said "Her dogs were everything to her. I think she got interested in the Scottie dogs after she ordered one from England."