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THE ARCHIVES AT BETHANY

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Miss. Anna Wagner (1890-1975)



Housemother of the Century 1963, an auspicious title bestowed once here on the Bethany Campus and to one so deserving, **Miss. Anna L. Wagner** who served the Bethany campus for 40 years working with over 1000 youth. Miss. Anna came to us from Bangor, PA. Once here, she would return as she could, to visit her family while taking young ladies from Leinbach along with her for the visit. From the letters we have on file we can also see that she enjoyed spending time in Florida with her sister, brother-in-law, and nephew Jim. Her final years would be spent at Phoebe Retirement home in Allentown, PA. Letters on file showed a consistent contact with Rev. Adams, after she retired from Bethany, the Home was never far from her heart.

Miss. Anna, a campus regular from 1922 until 1965, only left for a short time in the 20's to care for a family members fatherless children, she began her time at Bethany in Frick Cottage with the babies; in 1930 went to Knerr Cottage and worked with young boys aged 6-10 years; finally, she would spend twenty-eight years molding and making memories with the young women of Lienbach Cottage.

Many young women, and men, have such fond memories of Miss. Anna, she is mentioned fondly in two of the books written by Bethany Alumni and remembered by several for the purposes of this newsletter.



Memory – Sandy Webber (Belleman)

When my two sisters and I arrived at Bethany in 1952 we were quarantined in the infirmary for a length of time so they could check our basic health before inducing us to the rest of the residents of the home. When we were cleared, they put us in the cottages that best fit our age group. My older sister Kay and I were put in Santee Hall while my youngest sister Marjorie Belleman went to Leinbach cottage where Miss Anna was the house mother.

Miss Anna immediately was taken in with Marjorie. She just doted on her from the very first day she got there. She wanted to adopt her but of course that was not allowed. Other people wanted to adopt her also, but Miss Anna made sure they knew that she could not be adopted because our father forbade it.

Everybody knew that Marjorie was her very special ward and nobody could take care of her but she herself. My older sister could probably also tell you stories about this.

I guess I feel happy that this was the case with my little sister because Miss Anna was replacing our mother for Marjorie.

Miss. Anna was known the campus over and remembered long after leaving by the young women and hailed by their eventual husbands as “the woman who took an interest and taught them all that they needed to know to care for their home and children.” (Pop Auggie regarding his wife, Anna Augustine, and her time with Miss. Anna.)



Miss Effie Berkenstock, Reading, representing the Alumni greets employees honored at Centennial Homecoming, June 23. Front row l. to r., Miss Effie Berkenstock, Miss Anna Wagner, Miss Kathryn Good, Miss Grace Hefelfinger; second row, Howard Schreffler, W. Earl Breneman, Dr. Harry S. Good.

In 1963, Miss. Anna would be named, the first and only, Housemother of the Century at Bethany Children’s Home, later that year she would take a leave of absence after suffering a stroke and subsequently a heart attack while visiting family in Florida. Shortly after that she would officially retire from the Home in 1965.

Memory – Betsy Adams

I have many fond memories of Miss Anna. As the daughter of Rev. Adams growing up at Applegate, I often was at Leinbach playing with the girls who were my age. When I was growing up, the Leinbach girls were about 5 -10 years old. Miss Anna and Miss Coldren were the two housemothers.

Miss Anna was always a warm, caring, positive person who just seemed to like everyone and make you feel good. She always welcomed me to the group. I often stayed and had supper with the girls and even would sleep over on Friday night many times. I remember going to her funeral with my parents. I think in Bangor or somewhere north of the Lehigh Valley. She had a nephew we called Uncle Jim who would come and visit.

I always thought that naming the social worker’s area of the administration was a great way to remember the type of person she was and her influence on many girls.



Dr. Edward O. Butkofsky greets Miss Anna Wagner on the day of dedication for Butkofsky-Wagner-Santee Hall at Bethany as Mr. Sherman Hill of Lancaster, Board Member, and Dr. Garnet O. Adams look on.

In 1975 Miss Anna would return to the Bethany campus for the final time to enjoy the festivities surrounding the dedication of a section of building being named in her honor, *Butkowsky-Wagner-Santee Building*, Wagner Hall was to be used, at that time, as the social worker's area and was dedicated to memorialize her dedication and legacy to Bethany Children's Home. Miss. Anna traveled from Phoebe Home in Allentown on May 21st to participate in the dedication festivities on campus. Sadly, shortly after her visit to the Bethany campus, her home for over 40 years, Miss. Anna would pass away June 13th.

Memory – Bert Arnold (Bertha Rose Gensemer)

“Miss Anna, the Matron in charge at Leinbach, was a kindly early 40’s year old woman. She never seemed to be hassled and that added a sense of stability to me nor did she ever raise her voice at any of us. She wore a housedress with an apron over her dress which she took off only for church or days off. She even wore these dresses when she “dressed up” to go to her hometown or to Reading. She had no other clothes, nor did she want anything fancier. She cared for twenty-five children ages five to eight with help from two older girls at mealtime. She was no beauty, but she had the soul of a saint. She took to me immediately and I learned to count on her for support and special attention.

Miss Anna saw my good qualities and encouraged me to utilize them by giving me more responsibilities than the other girls. She gave me opportunities the others did not have, such as piano lessons or cleaning a teacher’s room or taking the lead in plays. She was never obvious with words or emotions, but her actions spoke louder than words. I did not rebel or complain because I loved all these activities. Jobs gave me meaning and purpose, and still do.” (Excerpt from Somewhere Out there A Memoir, B. Arnold pgs. 22-23)



Staff Photo (Marsden Scrap Book) mid-1940s
Miss. Anna seated row 4th from end.



Staff Photo (Marsden Scrap Book) early 1940s Miss.
Miss. Anna seated 2nd from end.