

# Refugee Family Rebuffed

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ISLAND POND, Vt.—Officials of this small northeastern Vermont town have turned away a family of 15 Vietnamese refugees apparently out of a fear that it might be a drain on the town's economy.

Elaborate welcoming plans made by three local sponsoring families for Touneh Han Tho, a former deputy minister of ethnic affairs for the defeated Saigon government, have been canceled because of the rebuff.

Tho, as a result, has split up his family, sending seven members to live with friends in California while he, his wife and children remain in a refugee camp in Indiantown Gap, Pa., without any solid prospect of a place to settle.

The controversy has left Island Pond's 1,200 residents divided over who was to blame for the rebuff. It also has raised doubts over whether a small, economically depressed rural town can absorb the financial im-



JOSEPH GOLDOVITZ  
... sponsored family

pact of a large refugee family.

The Tho family's sponsors insist that the refugees could have lived here without being a burden on the community.

Hundreds of residents signed a petition pledging support of the family, and many donated clothing,

food, blankets and money to get the refugees started.

One of the sponsors, Joseph Goldovitz, offered Tho a partnership in his restaurant and made available, rent-free, three interconnecting apartments with a total of 12 bedrooms. Local churches pledged their support, and a furniture factory volunteered to donate furniture.

Goldovitz said he planned to help Tho open his own restaurant eventually so the family could be self-sufficient.

"The whole thing is so discouraging it makes me sick. These are fine, educated people who could have added something to this community," said Goldovitz, who also owns a small motel and several rental properties in town.

However, town officials saw it differently.

"Who the hell is going to hire Vietnamese people when there aren't enough jobs around here for our own people?" asked Joseph

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Wade, the town's first selectman.

"I don't believe the federal government should bring in a bunch of people and then dole them out on welfare at our cost. We've got nothing against the Vietnamese, but why should small towns like this bear the burden of people that the federal government brought over here?" he added.

Wade and the town clerk, Maynard Osborne, said that the three older children of the Tho family would cost the town \$1,500 each for tuition at the North County Union High School in Newport, 22 miles away. Elementary school costs for the younger children would amount to \$650 each, they said.

Despite the guarantees of employment and financial assistance offered by sponsoring families, Wade sug-

gested the refugee family would end up on welfare.

"We've got enough people on welfare as it is now. The welfare rolls have been very lenient in this state," he said. The unemployment rate in Island Pond is about 9 per cent; about 200 families are receiving food stamps, according to Osborne.

Renauld Gaboriault, a town selectman and owner of a feed and hardware store, said, "There's no anti-Vietnamese feeling. It's just that times are bad and people have to look out for themselves."

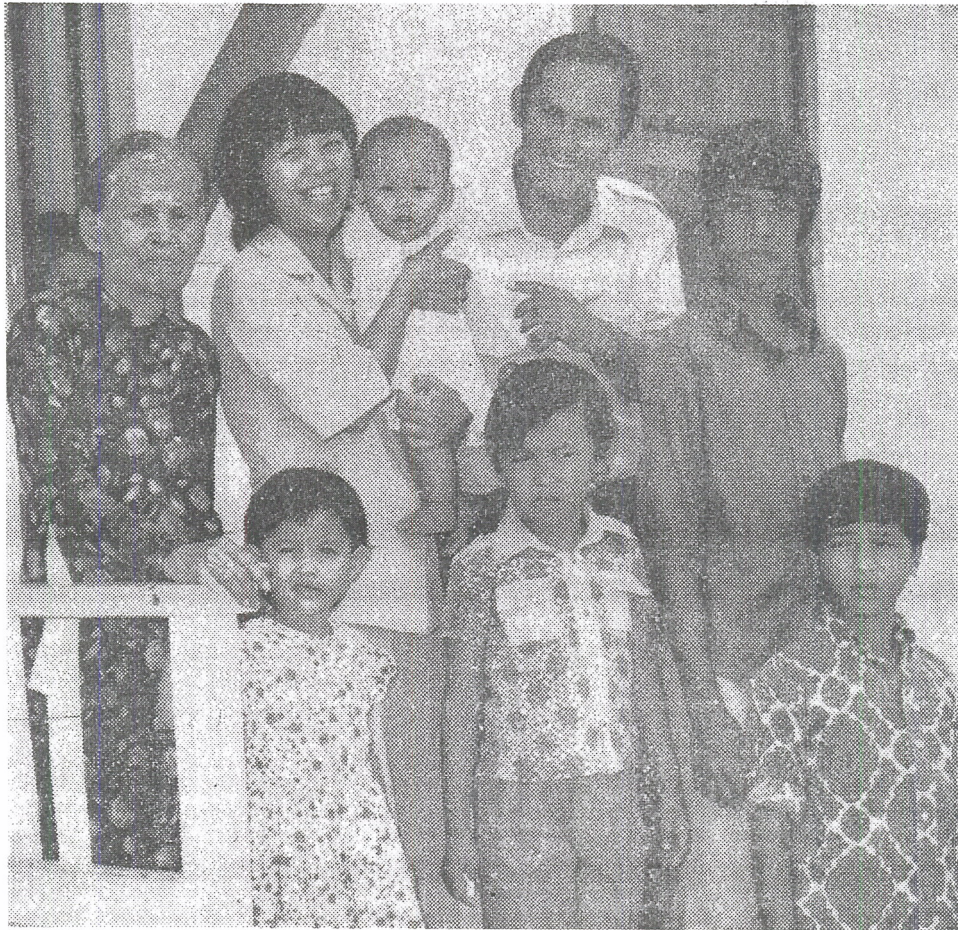
Thirty years ago, Island Pond — located 20 miles

south of the Canadian border in Vermont's timber-rich Northeast Kingdom—was a thriving industrial town that derived a measure of wealth in lumbering, manufacturing, farming and railroad ing.

It was the midway point of the old Grand Trunk railway from Montreal to Portland, Maine, and its Canadian National Railway roundhouses and shops serviced the line's steam locomotives.

With the advent of the diesel and a decline in manufacturing, Island Pond fell on the economic hard times that Wade and other town officials said is the basis of their opposition to refugees' settling here.

However, some local residents said there is an underlying, natural suspicion by native Vermonters of any outsiders, and that the rejection of the Tho family is based more on that than on economic reasons.



Associated Press

Touneh Han Tho and some members of his family outside barracks at Indiantown Gap, Pa.

"Vermonters are proud, fiercely independent people and they don't like sudden, abrupt changes that they don't understand. What could be more abrupt and different than an Asian family of 15 persons moving into a town this small?" asked Ernest Glenn, a retired career soldier who moved here six years ago and became a deputy sheriff.

Arthur Mathau, minister of the local Evangelical Baptist Church, said, "I think the selectmen (councilmen) created the fear through this school tuition thing, and it served as a handy excuse for some people who weren't able to explain why they really didn't want this family. It's been a tragedy for this town."

Goldovitz said he thought jealousy linked to the prospect of outsiders' becoming financially successful in a depressed town was behind the opposition.

"People hate to see outsiders—people not born and brought up here—own property and appear to be wealthy and successful," he said.

Goldovitz noted that he is Jewish, that his mother, Jean Bresciani, was remarried to an Italian and that the family moved here from Massachusetts.

"That's enough by itself to make us unwelcome to some people, but then we start bringing a bunch of Vietnamese," he said. How do you think that goes over in Island Pond, Vt.?"

In a telephone interview from Indiantown Gap, Tho

said, "I regret we cannot go there (Island Pond). Our first desire was to live with Mr. Goldovitz. I don't know what happened."

Tho said he hoped someday to visit Island Pond. "Mr. Goldovitz is a very good man. Even though we did not meet, we are like brothers from the telephone calls and letters," he said. "If I leave the camp, surely I will go visit him."

Tho said he had not been informed of the details of the town officials' opposition, but that he hoped their decision could be reversed.

If not, he said, he hoped to find another sponsor soon. One possibility, he said, is a friend in Washington, D.C., who he said is trying to arrange employment for Tho.

"If we cannot find a sponsor soon, I will have to send the rest of my family to Santa Barbara, Calif., with friends. I hope something

else can be done," Tho said.

Caught in the middle of the controversy was the Charities, which canceled the family's settlement here two weeks ago on the day it was supposed to leave Indiantown Gap.

Apparently yielding to pressure from the selectmen, officials of Vermont Catholic Charities said the reason given for the cancellation was that the apartments offered by Goldovitz did not meet state fire codes.

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. Paul M. Bresnehan, head of Vermont's Catholic Charities in Burlington, said in a telephone interview, "I understand there was some concern about whether the town could afford this fam-

ily. But our judgment was made on the housing."

However, a memorandum filed in the state capital in Montpelier by a state fire marshal indicates that Vermont Catholic Charities may not have had cause to cancel the refugees on that basis.

Fire marshal Glen Smith wrote that a July 18 inspection showed the house "substantially meets Vermont fire prevention codes" and that occupancy approval would be contingent on Goldovitz making several minor repairs.

The apartments, covering the second floor above Goldovitz' restaurant, appear to be clean and structurally sound, although a Vermont Catholic Charities caseworker had suggested they

might be in violation of health codes.

The alleged fire and health violations, Bresciani charged, were contrived by the town officials to give Vermont Catholic Charities "an excuse to cancel the sponsorship of this family. They know the real reason they did it."

Msgr. Bresnehan has said that because of the divisiveness and local publicity surrounding the controversy, it may be inadvisable for the Tho family to move into Vermont. However, he pointed out that at least three Vietnamese refugee families have been settled in other Vermont communities.

Some town officials, meanwhile, remain adamant about any Vietnamese settling in Island Pond.

"If there are any attempts to bring any Vietnamese into this town, I want to see guarantees from the federal government that they will be supported, or I'm going to buck it. Why should we foot the bill?" asked Wade.

He emphasized that Island Pond's selectmen had made no official decisions on the matter, and that "these opinions are our own."

Bresciani, however, challenged the legal authority of any selectman to keep refugees out of Island Pond.

More important, she said, is the moral right of local residents to give help to outsiders in need of a new home.

"What's the matter with the warm, compassionate people of Island Pond? I may be a Pollyanna, but I

think we should do something for these poor refugees."

### **Nearly 50% of Emigres Relocated, Army Says**

FT. CHAFFEE, Ark., Aug. 3 (AP)—Nearly half the Indochinese refugees who fled to the United States during the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia have been processed out of the four domestic relocation camps, the Army said today.

Of the 105,548 refugees sent from Guam to the domestic relocation centers, 54,286 were in camp today, Ft. Chaffee spokesman Capt. Frank Canavo said.

Chaffee had the largest refugee population today, 21,963. Camp Pendleton, Calif., had 16,284; Indian-

town Gap, Pa., 12,904, and Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., 3,135.

The refugee population at Guam was 4,899.

During the three months it has operated as a relocation center, Ft. Chaffee has received 42,356 refugees and processed 20,393. Camp Pendleton has processed 27,223, Indiantown Gap 6,933 and Eglin 6,933.

The total number of refugees processed out by the four camps was 61,597, but Cannavo said some of the refugees have been in two or more camps and have been counted more than once.

More than 2,000 refugees have been returned to Guam, at their own request for repatriation to their homelands, Cannavo said.