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Pleasant Hill (Towner) School Bus Tragedy

Intensive Survey Plan, 2012



Front Range Research Associates, Inc.
Denver, Colorado

Pleasant Hill (Towner) School Bus Tragedy
Intensive Survey Plan
2012

Prepared for:

Kiowa County
Historic Preservation Commission
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COVER: The Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 bus is shown at the site where it stalled in a ditch on the west side of the Towner-Holly Road. SOURCE: Eads High School and Kiowa County Historical Society, *Kiowa County* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, ca. 2010).

1
INTRODUCTION

The Pleasant Hill (Towner) School Bus tragedy of March 1931 still reverberates strongly among the residents of southeastern Colorado and southwestern Kansas and is recognized as an important event in the region's history. Popularly known as the Towner School Bus Tragedy (as a newspaper publisher christened it in recognition of the closest town), the incident claimed six lives, drew national media attention, and deeply affected survivors and communities in the vicinity. The tragedy received widespread notice throughout the nation, and its influence is seen in lasting changes to school communication systems, pupil release policies related to weather, and bus safety modifications. Recognizing the continuing interest in and significance of the event, the Kiowa County Historic Preservation Commission (KCHPC) initiated this project to identify extant historic resources associated with the tragedy to include in future intensive survey efforts.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to prepare a plan for a future intensive survey of historic resources associated with the Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy. The project identified and examined published accounts of the tragedy and interviewed descendants and other knowledgeable local residents to identify the types and locations of extant buildings, structures, objects, and sites associated with the event. A brief historic context was compiled to facilitate preservation planning. The location of each identified resource was visited and photographed. Table 1 in the Project Recommendations section lists each identified resource and its priority for future intensive survey (high, medium, or low) based on association with the tragedy and physical integrity.

Project Results

The results of the project include:

- Preparation of a brief historic context to assist preservation planning
- Completion of interviews with three people possessing substantial knowledge about the tragedy
- Identification of twenty historic resources associated with the tragedy
- Site visit to locate and photograph (where possible) each identified resource
- Evaluation of each identified resource in terms of priority for intensive survey.

Funding and Participants

This project was funded by a Certified Local Government grant from History Colorado to Kiowa County (grant number CO-11-016). Historians Thomas H. and R. Laurie Simmons of Front Range Research Associates, Inc., completed the windshield survey, conducted interviews, and compiled this plan. Liz Simmons conducted research and contributed to the historic context. Kelly Courkamp and Sharon Johnson of the Kiowa County Historic Preservation Commission coordinated the project for the county. Leslie Giles, History Colorado Historical and Architectural Survey Coordinator, provided suggestions about the methodology and reviewed the preservation

plan. Dan Corson managed the project for the Colorado's Certified Local Government program.

2

METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFICATION OF ASSOCIATED RESOURCES

Identification of Resources Associated with the Tragedy

Listed and Previously Surveyed Resources. No resources associated with the Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy are listed in the National, State, or Kiowa County registers. A file search of History Colorado's COMPASS database showed one resource associated with the tragedy had been surveyed in 1974: 5KW.32 (the 1962 monument commemorating the incident located along Kiowa County Road 78 south of Towner).

Literature Review. Several published books provide historical background information about Kiowa County, including: Roleta D. Teal and Betty Lee Jacobs, *Kiowa County* (1976); Ruthanna Jacobs, *Kiowa County Colorado Centennial History, 1989* (1989); Kiowa County Public Library, *Kiowa County Album: Pioneer Women, 1887-1920* (1983); *Railroads in the Development of Kiowa County* (1983); and Arthur V. Lewis, "A Brief History of Kiowa County, Colorado" (M.A. Thesis, 1938). A survey of county resources conducted by Thomas H. and R. Laurie Simmons in 2008-2009 produced a report with a historic context for the county: *Kiowa County, Colorado, Historic Buildings Survey: Eads, Haswell, and Sheridan Lake.*

Books focusing specifically on the bus tragedy include: Georgene Pearson, *A Light in the Window* (1995); Ariana Harner and Clark Secrest, *Children of the Storm* (2001); Alice Mitchem Jenkins, *Lost in a Blizzard: The Towner Bus Tragedy* (2001); and E.N. Coons, *36 Hours of Hell* (1988).

Newspapers across the country carried articles about the tragedy. Colorado newspapers followed the story for days. The *New York Times* published at least a dozen articles about the events in 1931. The *Los Angeles Times* printed eight stories in 1931, and papers such as the *Dallas Morning News, Omaha World Herald, Portland Oregonian, Tampa Tribune,* and *San Diego Union* carried the bus tragedy news. Popular magazines such as *Time* and *Life* also printed feature articles. In 2000 *New York Times* columnist Verlyn Klinkenbourg wrote about visiting an exhibit on the tragedy in the Kiowa County Museum in Eads.

Local List of Resources. The Kiowa County Historic Preservation Commission (KCHPC) talked to local residents and prepared a list of known resources associated with the bus tragedy to be considered for intensive survey. This list served as a starting point for the project.

Interviews. KCHPC also identified living people closely associated with the tragedy or possessing extensive knowledge of the tragedy. Three such people agreed to be interviewed during the planning project to provide information about the historic resources associated with the 1931 events. Interviews with three people occurred in February 2012:

- Lois Reinert McCracken, Prairie Pines Assisted Living, Eads. The daughter of Andy and Fern Reinert, Mrs. McCracken shared her knowledge about the tragedy, including family stories, documents, and photographs. The children from the bus were taken to the Reinert Ranch after being rescued.

- Jill Brown Briggs, Holly. The daughter of bus survivor Rosemary Brown, Mrs. Briggs and her husband discussed their memories of what Mrs. Brown told them about the incident and what they have learned from other sources. They identified the location of one of the schools moved to Holly. Jill Briggs loaned two videotapes: a KCNC-TV Denver segment on the tragedy and a panel discussion of the event sponsored by the Greeley (Kansas) County Historical Society.

- Jesse Melton, Granada. Mr. Melton has studied and spoken about the bus tragedy for many years and is considered a local expert on the events. He provided insights into the timeline of the tragedy, displayed his dioramas of the tragedy area, and identified the current locations of the Pleasant Hill School buildings.

In addition to the three interviews described above, a number of additional people and organizations were contacted by telephone or email, including: former Colorado Historical Society publications editor and an author of *Children of the Storm* Clark Secrest; Arianna Harner, co-author of that book; Sarah Martin, National Register Coordinator, Kansas Historical Society; Nola Mae Ice, Holly Public Library; Nadine Cheney, Greeley County Historical Society, Tribune, Kansas; Betsy Barnett, principal of Eads High School; Rod and Sharon Johnson, Eads; Bruce Little, Colorado Department of Education; Pat Palmer, Lamar; Larry Bluthardt, Kansas Department of Education, Topeka, Kansas; and Phyllis Reinert, owner of the Andy Reinert house near the tragedy site.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork occurred in February 2012, after research and interviews identified the locations of resources associated with the tragedy. The location of each extant resource was examined; in many cases, such as the sites of most of the houses in the area at the time of the tragedy, nothing remained but agricultural fields. Digital images were taken of each location, and a GPS reading was noted. For standing resources, notes were taken on the general nature and apparent physical integrity. No survey forms or photographic prints were prepared as part of this project. Aerial images were consulted of the locations from 1988 to the present.

Project Participants

Front Range Research Associates, Inc., of Denver, Colorado, prepared the survey plan as a consultant to the Kiowa County Historic Preservation Commission (KCHPC). R. Laurie Simmons and Thomas H. Simmons of Front Range Research completed research, fieldwork, and plan preparation, with assistance by Liz Simmons.

Kelly Courkamp and Sharon Johnson served as project coordinators for the KCHPC, preparing progress reports, assisting in locating information and people, and generally ensuring that the project proceeded smoothly. Leslie Giles, Architectural and Historical Survey Coordinator, and Dan Corson administered the project for the Certified Local Government program of History Colorado.

4
HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Pleasant Hill (Towner) School Bus Tragedy, 1931

Introduction

Agriculture, stockraising, and dairying were the principal industries in Kiowa County during the early twentieth century. The 1930 *State Year Book* indicated the county encompassed more than 700,000 acres of land devoted to dryland farming and almost 300,000 acres used for grazing. Beginning in 1931 rainfall was below average, and the county became part of the nation's "dust bowl" that experienced severe drought and enormous dust storms. Like much of the agricultural sector of the state, the 3,786 people living in Kiowa County had entered the Great Depression.[1] As George B. Mathews, Sr., noted, "Many left during the dirty thirties; land was cheap, but no one had money to buy it."[2]

By 1930 19 school districts served the county, which included 31 school buildings and 62 teachers. Outside of the larger towns, such as the county seat of Eads, most of the schoolhouses were small frame buildings scattered throughout the countryside to serve farm families.

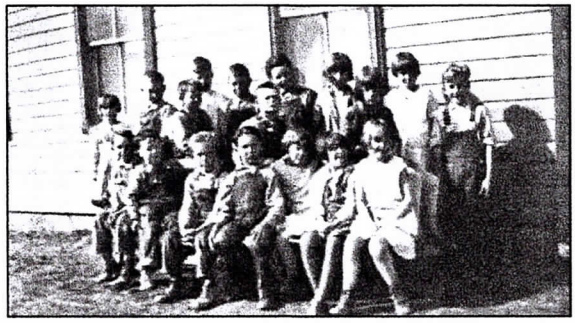


Figure 1. Class photograph of Pleasant Hill School's first through sixth graders taken shortly before the tragedy. SOURCE: Harner and Secrest, *Children of the Storm*, xviii.

In March 1931 the state and the nation turned their attention to one of these isolated communities in Kiowa County, where on 26 March 1931, a bus full of children attending the Pleasant Hill School near the Kansas border entered a snowstorm and stalled. Those aboard the bus were stranded for more than a day in blizzard conditions without heat, water, or food, resulting in the deaths of the bus driver and five children, as well as physical and psychological injury to the survivors. The tragedy received extensive media coverage across the state and the nation and resulted in efforts to improve school transportation, communication systems, and weather-related student

[1] *Colorado Year Book*, 1930, 57, 63, and 228.

[2] Tolbert R. Ingram, comp. and ed., *Year Book of the State of Colorado, 1930* (Denver: State Board of Immigration, 1931), 13; Lewis, "A Brief History," v and 31; Hafen, *Colorado and Its People*, vol. 1, 564; Germaine A. (Jerri) Legg, "Rose Edmonds Legg," in Teal and Jacobs, *Kiowa County*, 187-190; "Eads, Colorado, Monthly Total Precipitation," and "Haswell, Colorado, Monthly Total Precipitation," accessed at http://www.wrcc.dri.edu.cgi-bin on 13 January 2010; Mathews in Teal and Jacobs, *Kiowa County*, 8.

release procedures.

The Blizzard[3]

Thursday, 26 March 1931, started out like any other day for the students of Pleasant Hill School in southeastern Kiowa County, Colorado. Located on the plains near the Kansas border, the school served about thirty pupils through the eighth grade.[4] The students came from farm families living in the vicinity of the school, including some from western Kansas. When the children awoke that morning, it was so warm—sixty degrees—that eleven-year-old Louise Stonebraker convinced her mother to let her leave home with a light sweater recently received for her birthday instead of the jacket she normally wore. It seemed that spring had come.



Figure 2. Children play outside south of the first through sixth grade building at the Pleasant Hill School. SOURCE: Jenkins, *Lost in a Blizzard*, 26.

Two drivers split the duty of delivering students to school each day. Oscar Reinert transported seven students from the western part of the area in his car, while Carl Miller picked up students from the eastern section. Both started out as usual that day, but met very different fates as the sudden blizzard descended. Reinert never made it to the school. He got caught in the snowstorm and sought shelter for himself and his seven passengers at the Crum house, where they spent the next day-and-a-half safely waiting out the storm.

Carl Miller and his passengers were not so lucky. Miller drove a makeshift school bus—actually a 1929 Chevrolet truck with a wooden school bus body attached to its bed—to carry twenty children to and from school. The "seats" actually were wooden benches. Two of the rear windows of the bus were broken, with cardboard covering the openings, and the vehicle lacked both heat and a radio. This type of "school bus" was common at the time, especially in rural areas.

Although the weather seemed extraordinarily nice early in the morning, the forecast on the radio called for snow. By the time Miller picked up his students and reached Pleasant Hill School, the skies were dark, the wind was blowing, and a light snow was falling.

The school facilities consisted of two simple one-room frame buildings and two outhouses on the open prairie. There were no trees or playground equipment on the grounds, and the closest farmhouse stood a half-mile away.[5] One building served students in grades one through six, while the other housed grades seven and eight. The smaller school, formerly known as New Hope, had been moved the year before from the Stonebraker property.[6]

Experienced teacher Maude Moser taught

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[3] Much of the information in this historical overview is derived from Ariana Harner and Clark Secrest, *Children of the Storm* (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 2001). Harner and Secrest's book was the result of extensive research and interviews with the survivors and is considered the most detailed and accurate account of the events associated with the Towner Bus Tragedy.

[4] The school was located fourteen miles south of Towner and seventeen miles north of Holly.

[5] Jesse Melton, Granada, Colorado, Interview by Thomas H. and R. Laurie Simmons, 24 February 2012.

[6] Melton, Interview, 24 February 2012.

the younger grades, while first-year teacher Franz Freiday worked with the older students. Worrying about the weather conditions that day, the teachers discussed the situation and decided they would have the drivers take the students back home as soon as they arrived at Pleasant Hill School.

The two schoolhouses were in poor condition to shelter the children comfortably during a snowstorm, especially if they had to spend the night. There was no supply of food, little water, no blankets, and a limited amount of coal to heat the building. The schools were not equipped with phones that would have enabled the teachers to communicate with the local families. In fact, telephones were still a rare commodity on the sparsely populated eastern plains of Colorado at that time—the local Stonebraker family had one of the only phones in the area.

When Miller arrived at the school with his passengers, the teachers told him to take the children back. They believed the driver could beat the storm if he left immediately. Miller disagreed with the decision to turn around, arguing that the storm probably would not last long and they would be safer staying in the school, where some heat would be available. He also theorized some parents might come to the school to pick up their children. In the end, the teachers insisted Miller take the children home while they continued to wait for Reinert's arrival. If nothing else, they argued, the children would be better off spending the storm in a nearby farmhouse where there would be food, heat, and blankets. Miller was upset about this decision but followed the teachers' instructions.

The children, who had exited the bus and began playing outside after reaching the school, were told to return to the vehicle. About 9 a.m. Miller drove away with the students, who were excited about the snow holiday. By that time the wind and snow already were making it difficult to see immediately ahead; a blizzard had descended on the area. Leaving the schoolyard, Miller got lost almost immediately. Unable to even see the radiator cap on his truck hood, he decided to head to the nearby Untiedt dwelling to wait out the storm; there was no way he would be able to drop off the students at their homes.

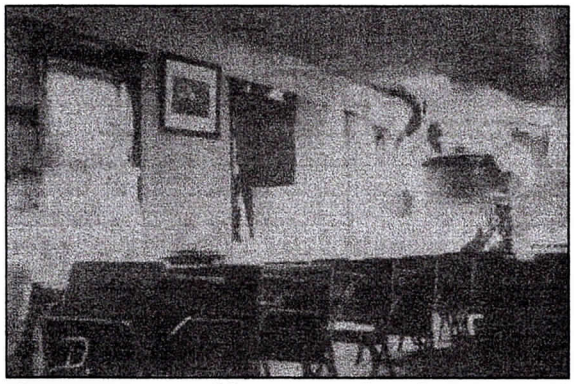


Figure 3. Snow blew into the classroom of Pleasant Hill School during the blizzard. SOURCE: Harner and Secrest, *Children of the Storm*, 32.

With his windshield frosted over and no landmarks visible in the storm, Miller made a wrong turn. Instead of taking the intended "prairie road" that ran a short distance diagonally from the school to the Untiedt farm, he drove east and unknowingly circled a pasture in the blinding snow. In this sparsely populated area, roads were often primitive. As the authors of *Children of the Storm,* Ariana Harner and Clark Secrest, explained, "Pleasant Hill's gravel roads did not follow section lines, as they do today, and some roads weren't roads at all. Instead, residents took direct routes across the plains to the neighbor's house."[1]

Reaching the Untiedt place usually took fifteen minutes, so Miller knew he was lost when he still had not spotted a single

identifying feature over thirty minutes later. He apparently reasoned that if he just kept driving they would eventually see a house or some other landmark or run into a road. The older children began to realize they were lost and possibly in serious trouble. Around 9:30 a.m., the bus got stuck in a barrow ditch on the west edge of the Holly-Towner Road and the engine stalled, stranding them. Miller tried to get out of the vehicle to figure out where they were, but he could see only white snow. He could not restart the engine, which was packed with ice and snow.[7]

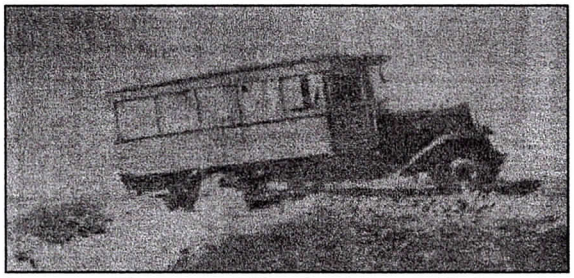


Figure 4. The makeshift school bus stalled on the open prairie on the west edge of the Holly-Towner Road. SOURCE: *Lamar Daily News*, March 1931, undated clipping in Holly Public Library.

With no heater, the bus offered very minimal protection from the elements. The stranded children had not been there long when the wind ripped off one of the pieces of cardboard covering the broken rear windows. Cold and snow came streaming in through the bottom of the vehicle and the broken windows in the back. Most students were not wearing very warm clothing or coats. As was traditional at the time, the girls all wore dresses with thin tights underneath.

The bus driver tried to start a small fire for warmth, burning pages from the students' schoolbooks and papers and some of the available wood on the bus in a milk can lid. The fire created little warmth and filled the bus with so much smoke the passengers were forced to open a window for ventilation. The children could not even eat the lunches they brought to school that day because the metal lunch pails froze shut and were impossible to pry open.

The bus driver ordered the children to exercise and move about continuously in an effort to ward off hypothermia, frostbite, and death. The older children—who had a better understanding of what a dangerous situation they were in—took it upon themselves to look after the younger ones and to keep them active. At first the children did not have a problem jumping around and the younger ones even thought it was fun. However, as the hours wore on and they got colder their energy and spirits declined.

During the afternoon the storm did not diminish at all, and Miller sent the oldest boy and the oldest girl out to see if they could locate anything that would help them figure out where they were. The wind was so strong it blew them over and they could barely get up again. They could see nothing but uninterrupted white and were forced to turn back. As it grew dark, the children continued to move around and exercise through the night in order to avoid falling asleep.

When the children failed to return home that night, worried parents assumed they had either found shelter at a nearby farmhouse or were in the safety of the school. Storms on the plains often came without warning, and strangers opened their homes to anyone in need. During those days when very few people had a telephone, communication during storms was often nonexistent. No one realized Miller left the school with the children and the bus was stranded.

Amazingly, everyone onboard stayed alive through the bitterly cold night by huddling together and continuing to

[7] Melton, Interview, 24 February 2012.

move around for warmth. Unfortunately, the storm still raged when Friday morning (27 March) came. In fact, it seemed even colder. Later, local residents learned the temperature that morning was minus twenty degrees Fahrenheit with seventy mile-per-hour winds. The back of the bus soon filled with snow that continuously blew in through the broken windows.

With the blizzard showing no signs of relenting, Miller believed he had no choice but to set off on foot to find help. He knew that the children would not be able to survive in the bus much longer. He instructed the older children to take care of the younger ones and stepped outside, never to be seen alive again. His frozen body was found by searchers the next day, about 3.5 miles south of the bus, on the Holly-Towner road. Though wearing gloves, his hands were badly cut from the barbed wire fence he clung to in an effort to keep his bearings.

Shortly after Miller departed to seek help, Louise Stonebraker, who wore only a light sweater and had refused to exercise, stopped moving completely. Realizing she had died, the other children left her body in the back of the bus where she had been sitting. Two other students—seven-year-old Kenneth Johnson and nine-year-old Bobbie Brown—also succumbed before help arrived. The children put their bodies with Louise. During the day, older children made several attempts to leave the bus and search for a sign of where they were, but the weather made determining their location impossible.

Rescue and Medical Efforts

When the storm lessened a little during the afternoon of the second day, Bud Untiedt, father of four of the children on the bus, set out for the school with food and blankets in his horse-drawn wagon. The continuing storm made it difficult to see where he was going, but Untiedt followed a fence line until he reached the buildings. Upon entering, he found huge drifts of snow had blown inside and no children or teachers were present. Two other fathers of the missing children, Ernie Johnson and Dave Stonebraker, also made their way to the school. Realizing the school bus might be stranded, the three frantically began searching the area.



Figure 5. Four of the little survivors at the Andy Reinert house after their rescue. SOURCE: Harner and Secrest, *Children of the Storm*, 55.

By Friday evening the storm began to break, but the children began to give up. They stopped exercising and became increasingly weak. They began to feel warmer in the bus and decided to take off their coats and place them on the floor of the vehicle. Then the younger children lay down to sleep, with the older children lying on top of them. Many of them must have been close to death at this point.

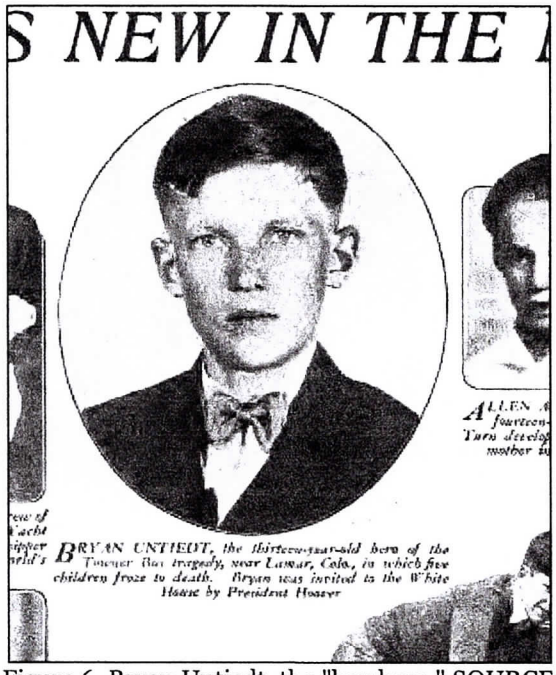
Dave Stonebraker and Bud Untiedt, two of the fathers who had gone searching for their children, found the stranded vehicle at this point. Breaking the door open, the men carried out the seventeen survivors, loaded them onto their wagon, and drove to Andy and Fern Reinert's place a half-mile up the road. They arrived at the ranch just after 5 p.m. The children had spent thirty-two hours on the bus by that point and some were critically ill.

When they reached at the Reinert house, the men tried to warm the children by massaging their limbs with snow and salt (a then-common practice), feeding them food cooked by Mrs. Reinert, and covering them in blankets. Some of the children's legs were painfully swollen and others could not feel their legs. As the students' limbs began to thaw, the pain became excruciating. Two of the rescued children—Mary Louise Miller and Arlo Untiedt—were already very weak by the time they left the bus and died during the night. That brought the total of dead children to five.

Edwin Reinert traveled to the Stonebraker's house to use their telephone to call towns in the vicinity to request a doctor and to spread the news of the tragedy. Families of the children were alerted that they had been found. Neighbors from around the area heard about what had happened and stopped by to help throughout the night. A group of men visited the Miller home, where the bus driver's wife was waiting for her husband with a candle burning in the window.

Citizens from Holly, including Dr. F.E. Casburn, traveled through the snow by car caravan to reach the farmhouse and provide assistance on Friday night. The Holly contingent took over for the local men who had been tending to the children. A group of men then returned to the silent bus to retrieve the dead bodies. On Saturday morning, 28 March, men from Tribune, Kansas, including Dr. Lemly Hubener, arrived at the Reinert place. The two doctors at the house recommended the survivors be moved as quickly as possible to a hospital.

Lamar Mayor Charles Maxwell, operator of a private hospital, offered its facilities for care of the children. Maxwell contacted Jack Hart, a local amateur pilot, who agreed to fly nurses to the Reinert place and bring the seriously injured back to Lamar. Hart took off on Saturday morning, landed in a field near the house, and returned with to Lamar with two of the most seriously injured children and one nurse. He then left again for the farmhouse. Napoleon M. Burnett, one of the Maxwell Hospital doctors, had studied frostbite care. Under his watch all of the children were reported to have survived without permanent damage.


S NEW IN THE

BRYAN UNTIEDT, the thirteen-year-old hero of the Towner Bus tragedy, near Lamar, Colo., in which five children froze to death. Bryan was invited to the White House by President Hoover

Figure 6. Bryan Untiedt, the "boy hero." SOURCE: *Boys' Life*, June 1931, 26.

Newspaper Coverage and Creation of a "Boy Hero"

The story of the tragedy made national headlines, appearing not only in the *Denver Post*, the *Rocky Mountain News*, and other local papers, but also in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Examiner*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Washington Herald*, *Washington Times* and other newspapers around the county. The entire nation became enthralled with the tragic tale. Frederick G. Bonfils, owner of the *Denver*

Post, was eager to turn the tragedy into a major human-interest story. He became determined to publicize the story for as long as it could to sell papers, capitalizing on and sensationalizing the tragedy. In fact, he dubbed the incident "the Towner School Bus Tragedy," even though it actually had little to do with that community.[8]



Figure 7. Nurses and their patients at the Maxwell Hospital in Lamar. SOURCE: Jenkins, *Lost in a Blizzard*, 53.

Bonfils dispatched a private airplane (a Fokker with an enclosed cabin), which he called "the Ship of Mercy," to assist with transporting the rest of the children who required medical care to Lamar. The plane arrived Saturday and carried a reporter and photographer assigned to cover the story, who quickly began talking to and taking pictures of those involved. Fred Warren, a *Post reporter,* was heard commenting to Bryan Untiedt's father, "What this story really needs is a hero. How would you like your son to be the hero?"[9] In reality, Bryan had not done anything particularly different from the other children, nor did he claim to be a hero. However, the press wanted a hero and he was chosen, perhaps because he was the oldest boy. Brian turned thirteen a few days after the blizzard.

All of the survivors were showered with donations, presents, and good will from the public and welcomed on special trips by towns across the state. Bryan Untiedt received a much greater share of public attention and the benefits that came with it than the others. Herbert Hoover even invited him to spend a week in Washington, D.C., where he met and had lunch with the president, chatted with dignitaries, and toured the city with the First Lady. Washington College in Maryland offered the boy a free college education. At one point he and Carl Miller were nominated (although not ultimately awarded) to receive a Carnegie medal.

In May 1931, the *New York Times* referred to Untiedt as "The nation's juvenile hero." *Boys Life* magazine told the story of the "boy hero," as he came to be known. Multiple articles about Untiedt appeared in national newspapers including the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, with headlines including "Boy Blizzard Hero Invited by Hoover," "Boy Hero Enjoys Hospital Birthday," and "Boy Hero Receives Run of the White House."

Funeral and Memorial

The Holly National Guard Armory, the largest building in the town, also played a role in the bus tragedy story. The armory served as a morgue where the victims' bodies were taken initially. The Kiowa County Coroner visited the site of the stalled bus and declared that an inquest would not be conducted since the deaths resulted from accidental freezing. Harner and Secrest found that no other agency

[8] Towner had its own school district. None of its students were injured in the blizzard, and its buses were not involved in any incidents.

[9] Harner and Secrest, *Children of the Storm*, 5.

investigated the tragedy.[10]

A group funeral service was held in the armory on Tuesday, 31 March, for the victims before their burial in Holly Cemetery. Businesses and schools closed and about one thousand people from southeastern Colorado and western Kansas were in attendance. The service included six open caskets, ministers from four churches, appropriate music, and reading of obituaries of the deceased. A movie crew, photographers, and reporters were among those heading to the cemetery, where two Colorado National Guard planes flew overhead scattering flowers as the coffins were placed in the ground.



Figure 8. Dedication of the tragedy monument at Holly Cemetery. SOURCE: Pearson, *A Light in the Window*, unpaged.

On 7 October 1931, almost seven hundred people attended a ceremony at Holly Cemetery to dedicate a monument consisting of a carved stone obelisk and the gravestones of the bus tragedy victims. Colorado lodges of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows raised funds for the monument and arranged the dedication. Participants heard speeches by religious leaders, a time capsule with newspaper clippings was placed inside the monument, and the Holly High School band played music. Among those in attendance were the wife and young son of Carl Miller, who along with his daughter Mary Louise, were victims of the blizzard.

Aftermath and Continued Influence

Their experiences in the bus haunted the survivors for the rest of their lives. Some, including Bryan Untiedt, refused to talk about it in later years. A few parents blamed the tragic events on the schoolteachers who insisted that Carl Miller take the children home. The Browns, Smiths, and Huffakers sued the insurer of the Pleasant Hill school district, arguing that "Carl Miller's bus was not properly equipped to withstand a storm and the insurance company had been negligent for not examining the equipment it was insuring."[11] The families participating in the suit received between $197.50 and $900 for injuries and death to their children.

At some point after the tragedy, Carl Miller's brother placed a small concrete slab as a memorial at the prairie site where the bus stalled. In 1962 the Towner and Holly Lion's clubs dedicated a polished stone memorial at the same site. The memorial is engraved with a school bus, a brief description of the event, and the names of those who died. Another memorial was placed in Holly on the playground of Shanner Elementary School. Pueblo businesses paid for a merry-go-round dedicated in memory of the bus tragedy children. The play equipment is still used by children attending the school.

People throughout the communities of Kiowa and Prowers counties mourned the victims of the storm, and their descendants still feel the pain of the events. The tragedy also changed the state and national psyche. Years later, one of the survivors described the 1999 Columbine School shootings in Littleton,

[10] Harner and Secrest, *Children of the Storm*, 64.

[11] Harner and Secrest, *Children*, 106.

Colorado, as having a similar effect on the country's outlook.[12]

Like Columbine, the incident influenced consideration of some reforms to prevent such a tragedy from happening again, including initiating the standard of requiring "school releases during inclement weather, bus upgrades and the addition of two-way radios to all buses."[13] The Colorado legislature discussed requiring schools to install phones, but implementation of the proposal took years.[14]

The Towner tragedy prompted people across the nation to think seriously about making improvements to student transportation safety. *The New York Times* published an article indicating the tragedy caused policy-makers to think about student transportation at the federal level: "The recent death of several children in a blizzard-bound school bus in Colorado turned the attention of the Federal Office of Education to the part played by the means of transportation in American education."

During the 1930s school buses were in the process of evolving from modifications of existing vehicles (including trucks and wagons) into a distinct vehicle type. In 1931, there were no standardized regulations for school buses, and in fact, many "school buses" were makeshift vehicles like the one Carl Miller drove. Two million children went by bus to and from school each day throughout the country during that time. The watershed year for school transportation was 1939, when rural education expert Dr. Frank W. Cyr organized the first National Minimum Standards conference, resulting in the adoption of forty-four standards by all manufacturers of school buses, including an agreement that all such vehicles would be painted bright yellow to increase visibility.[15]

The Pleasant Hill (Towner) School Bus Tragedy continues to be acknowledged as a significant historical event in the state and nation's educational history. In 2001 the Colorado Historical Society published the most detailed account of the tragedy, *Children of the Storm*. In 2007 *School Transportation News* included the incident on its timeline of important dates in the history of school transportation: "1931: On this March 26, the Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy in which five children froze to death, started with the worst storm in 56 years in southeastern Colorado." Also in 1931, "Superior manufactures first all-steel school bus with safety glass."[16]

Geographic Area and Resource Distribution

This project identified and examined resources associated with the Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy in Kiowa and Prowers counties, Colorado, and Greeley County, Kansas. Figure 9 is a detail map extracted from *Children of the Storm* that shows the immediate vicinity of Pleasant Hill School, the children's and bus driver's homes, the Andy Reinert Ranch where the victims were taken, and the location where the bus stalled. Figure 10 is an overview map of southeast Colorado

[12] Harner and Secrest, *Children of the Storm*, 116.
[13] Eads High School and Kiowa County Historical Society, *Kiowa County*, Images of America (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, ca. 2010), 117.
[14] Clark Secrest, "The School Bus to Hell," *Colorado Heritage* (Winter 1994): 4-13.
[15] School Transportation News website. "The History of School Transportation." Originally appeared in *School Transportation News* November 1999 and was updated in the August 2007 issue.
[16] School Transportation News website. "The History of School Transportation."

and southwest Kansas showing the general locations touched by the event. The principal geographic areas are discussed below.

Pleasant Hill Vicinity. The Pleasant Hill area is located in southeast Kiowa County, about 14 miles south of Towner and 17 miles north of Holly in Prowers County. Three farm families in western Greeley County, Kansas, sent students to the Pleasant Hill School because it was closer than any school in their home state. The Pleasant Hill area includes the site where the bus stalled (Resource 2) on the west side of County Road 78, now marked by a formal monument (Resource 20) recalling the tragedy. Erected in 1962, the monument incorporated an earlier, informal memorial marker. The site of the two-building Pleasant Hill School (Resource 3) lies about a mile northwest. The sites of the seven homes of students on the ill-fated bus lie within a four-mile radius east of the school, four in Colorado and three in Kansas (Resources 6 through 12). The Andy Reinert Ranch (Resource 13), where the survivors were taken after their rescue, is about 0.5 miles southeast of the tragedy site.

Lamar, Colorado. Lamar, the county seat of Prowers County, played a role in the tragedy as the home of the Charles Maxwell Hospital (Resource 16), where the surviving children were taken for medical treatment.

Holly, Colorado. Holly, Colorado, 28 miles east of Lamar in Prowers County and 31 miles south of Towner, holds five resources related to the tragedy: the former Colorado National Guard Armory (Resource 17), which served as a temporary morgue and where the funeral service for the victims was held; the burial plot holding the graves of the six victims and a monument commemorating them (Resource 18) in Holly Cemetery; a commemorative merry-go-round (Resource 19) dedicated to "the 1931 heroes of Pleasant Hill School District No. 17"; and the two Pleasant Hill School buildings (Resources 4 and 5), which were moved to Holly after the facility closed in the 1940s.

Unknown Locations. Locations are unknown for three resources associated with the tragedy (if they still exist): the school bus (Resource 1) and the two airplanes (Resources 14 and 15) used to ferry surviving children to the hospital in Lamar.

National Register Criteria, Criteria Considerations, Areas of Significance, and Period of Significance

An intensive survey of resources associated with the Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy has not been undertaken, so it is premature to assess potential eligibility of individual resources. However, based on the completion of the historic overview, interviews, and windshield survey, it is possible to discuss potential National Register Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas of Significance, relevant to evaluation of the resources.

National Register Criteria for Evaluation.[17] For a property to be eligible for listing in the National Register it must meet one of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation through its association with an important historic context and retain features with historic integrity necessary to convey its significance. The Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy is potentially significant under **Criterion A** for its association with events that have made a

[17] Much of the information in this section is derived from *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, a *National Register Bulletin* produced by the staff of the National Register program.

significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The events of the tragedy reflect the lifestyles and educational conditions common in isolated rural communities during the Great Depression and represent the impact of widespread press shaping and coverage of a tragic incident on the American psyche.

National Register Criteria Considerations. Three National Register Criteria Considerations may apply to some of the resources associated with the Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy. National Register Bulletin 16 states: "Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, ... structures that have been moved from their original locations, [and] ... properties primarily commemorative in nature ... shall not be considered eligible for the National Register." Such resources may be eligible, however, if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they individually meet specified Criteria Considerations.

- **Criteria Consideration B** provides a moved property may be eligible if it is "significant primarily for architectural value" or if it is "the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event." The two Pleasant Hill school buildings moved to Holly, while no longer significant for their architecture due to alterations, are rare surviving buildings from the area associated with the bus tragedy. Structures expected to be moved (such as the bus and the two airplanes) do not have to meet this requirement.
- **Criteria Consideration D** applies to cemeteries and provides "a cemetery is eligible if it derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events." The last provision may be applicable to the Pleasant Hill burial plot and monument in the Holly Cemetery. *National Register Bulletin 41*, dealing specifically with cemeteries and burials, gives an example: "A cemetery that is associated through its burials with a single important historical event such as a pivotal military battle."[18] The Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy might be viewed as a pivotal historical event.
- **Criteria Consideration F** states a primarily commemorative property may be eligible "if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance." The merry-go-round, Holly Cemetery memorial, and 1962 tragedy monument would have to be weighed against this criteria consideration.

Areas of Significance. The Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy appears potentially significant under Criterion A in the areas of **Education**, **Social History**, and **Communications**. In the area of **Education**, the deaths of five students and a school bus driver in a blizzard forced educational policymakers to reconsider how remote rural schools should prepare for and deal with weather emergencies, including such factors as dismissal policies, communications equipment, emergency provisions and fuel, and standards for school bus design. While not all changes in these areas can be attributable to the Pleasant Hill incident, it comprised one event

[18] Elisabeth Walton Potter and Beth M. Boland, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Cemeteries and Burial Places*, National Register Bulletin 41 (Washington: National Park Service, 1992), 17.

contributing to reforms.

In the area of **Social History**, the tragedy impacted the community of farm families in the attendance area of the Pleasant Hill School, who came together to rescue and support the victims of the blizzard and whose lives were forever changed by the events. Residents of the Kiowa and Prowers counties were involved in the rescue and commemoration of the victims. Due to extensive newspaper coverage, people across the state and nation focused their attention on the events unfolding on the Colorado plains.

In the area of **Communications**, the Pleasant Hill tragedy is an early twentieth century example of how the news media covered, exploited, and sensationalized a news event. The tragedy drew nationwide media coverage and engaged the interest of the general public and political leaders. Both the *Denver Post* and *Lamar Daily News* provided extensive coverage of the incident and its aftermath, with the *Post* employing an aircraft to quickly place its reporter and photographer at the site. The *Post* shaped the story by creating a "boy hero" who became the focus of attention for the public. The newspaper extended the story by bringing the survivors to Denver to further their recovery through sight-seeing, entertainment, and gifts and to enhance the newspaper's circulation and advertising revenues.

Period of Significance. Two dates are appropriately included in the Period of Significance for the resources associated with the tragedy. The year **1931** encompasses the date the bus left the school and became stalled in a blizzard, as well as the deaths, rescue and treatment of survivors, group funeral, and installation of the memorial at Holly Cemetery. In **1962** a memorial was established at the location where the bus stalled.

Associated Property Types

Properties associated with the Pleasant Hill (Towner) School Bus Tragedy may be classified into four broad categories: properties associated with the bus stalling in the blizzard; properties associated with the Pleasant Hill School, its students, and the bus driver; properties associated with the rescue and medical treatment of survivors and burial of the victims; and resources associated with the commemoration of the tragedy.

Properties Associated with the Bus Stalling in the Blizzard. Included in this category is the tragedy site on the west side of Kiowa County Road 78 (Resource 2) and Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Bus, the modified 1929 Chevrolet truck owned by driver Carl Miller (Resource 1).

Properties Associated with Pleasant Hill School and the Tragedy Participants. Properties in this category include the Pleasant Hill School site and its buildings (Resources 3, 4, and 5) and the houses and farmsteads where the passengers and driver of the bus resided in Kiowa County, Colorado, and Greeley County, Kansas (Resources 6 through 12).

Properties Associated with Rescue and Medical Treatment of Survivors and Funerals of the Victims. This property type includes resources providing immediate shelter, transport, and medical treatment to the survivors (the Reinert house, Resource 13), resources used to transport them to a medical facility (two airplanes, Resources 14 and 15), the Maxwell Hospital where they received treatment and convalesced (Resource 16), and the Colorado National Guard Armory in Holly, which served as a makeshift morgue for the victims' bodies and the site of the joint funeral service (Resource 17).

Properties Associated with Commemoration of the Tragedy. This property type includes monuments and other resources erected to commemorate the tragedy, including: the tragedy monument and burial plot in the Holly Cemetery (Resource 18); the ca. 1931 Karymor merry-go-round in Holly (Resource 19); and the 1962 monument at the tragedy site (Resource 20).

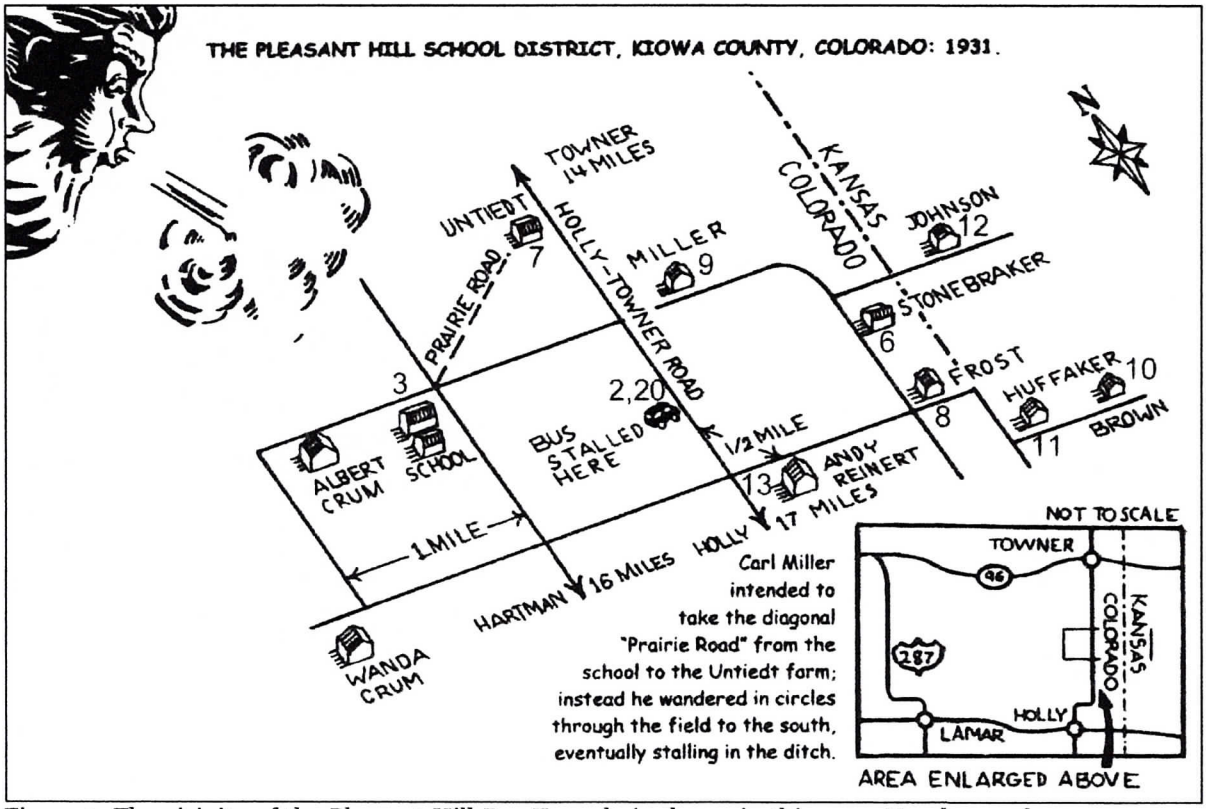


Figure 9. The vicinity of the Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy is shown in this map. Numbers reference resources listed in Chapter 5 and Table 1. SOURCE: Base map from Harner and Secrest, *Children of the Storm*, xviv.

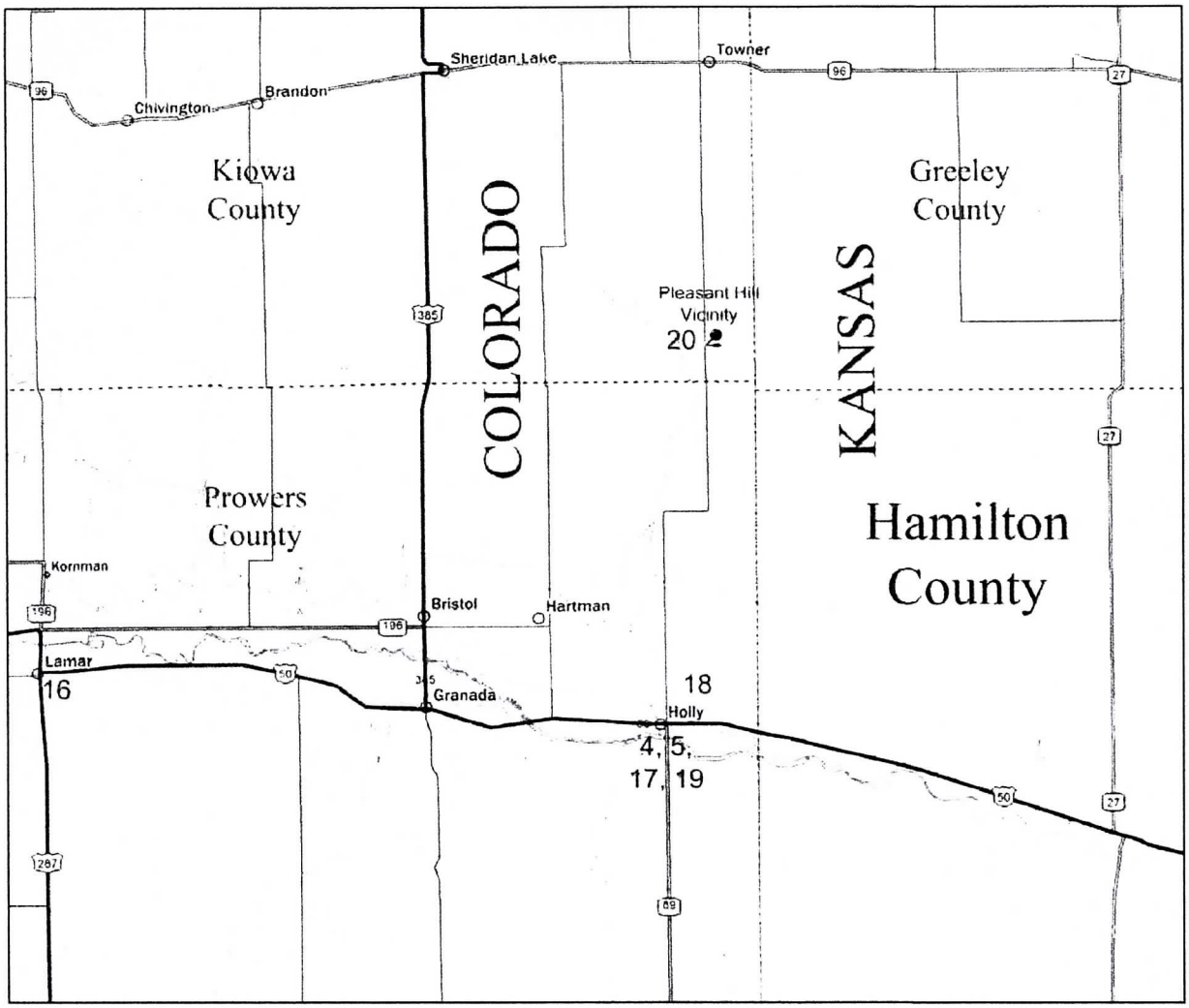


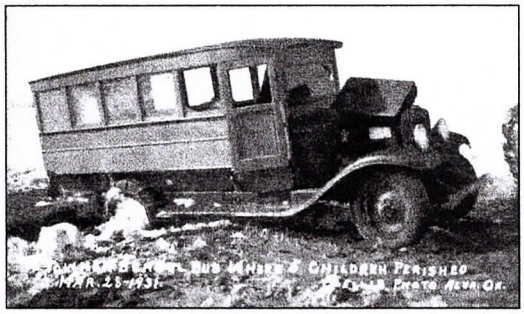
Figure 10. General vicinity map of southeast Colorado and southwest Kansas. Numbers reference resources listed in Chapter 5 and Table 1.

5
IDENTIFIED RESOURCES AND SURVEY PRIORITY

Introduction

This section includes brief profiles of the resources associated with the Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy based on the literature review, interviews, and fieldwork. Resource location, type of resource (site, building, structure, or object), notes on the apparent physical integrity, and current and historic photographs (if available) are included.

Pleasant Hill School Bus



Bus on west side of County Road 78 where it stalled (March 1931)



Bus (right) at monument dedication at Holly Cemetery (October 1931)

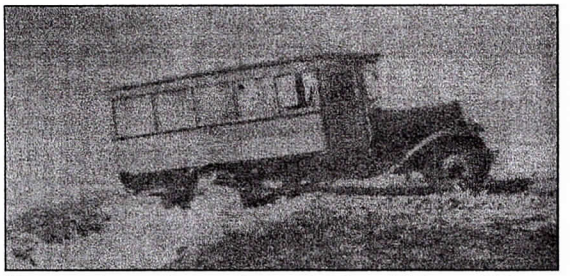
Resource: Pleasant Hill School Bus (1929), structure, whereabouts unknown, Resource 1.

Moved: Yes

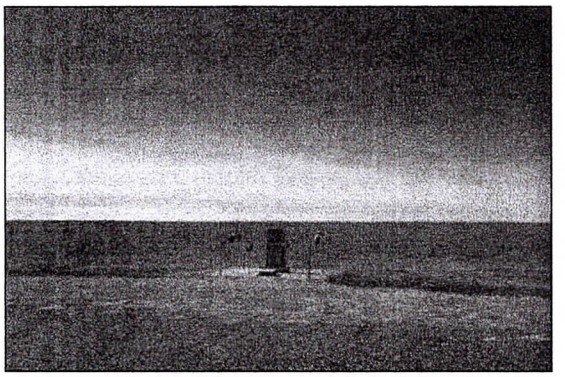
Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: School bus driver Carl Miller owned the vehicle used to transport the students involved in the tragedy. He built a wood superstructure atop the chassis of a 1929 Chevrolet truck. In the summer the superstructure could be removed and the truck used for farm tasks such as hauling grain. The vehicle was apparently still in the vicinity in October 1931 (see lower photo) at the dedication of the tragedy monument in the Holly Cemetery. The present whereabouts of the vehicle (if it still exists) are unknown. Historians Harner and Secrest in *Children of the Storm* did not discover what happened to the vehicle. Local residents, state school transportation officials in Colorado and Kansas, and descendants of survivors contacted in the current project could provide no information.

Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy Site



View north-northwest of tragedy site with bus still in place on the west side of Holly-Towner Road, March 1931



View west-southwest of the tragedy location, 2012

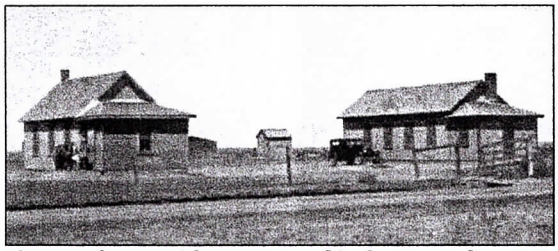
Resource: Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy Site (1931), site, Kiowa County Road 78 (west side between County Roads D and B; about 14 miles south of Towner and 17 miles north of Holly or 1.6 miles north of Kiowa-Prowers county line), Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 2.

Moved: No

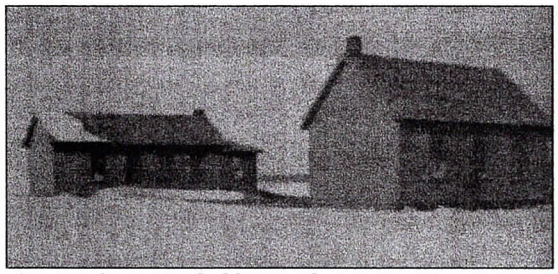
Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: The Pleasant Hill School bus stalled in a ditch on the west side of the Holly-Towner Road (County Road 78), about half way between County Roads C and D. Shortly after the tragedy, a relative of Carl Miller placed a concrete marker at the site. A 1962 monument marks the location (Resource 20) and plowed fields lay to the west. The county road is now wider now and paved, and the barbed wire fence bus driver Carl Miller followed seeking help is no longer present. The level prairie with few interruptions seen in all directions provides a direct link to the despair the victims of the blizzard experienced.

Pleasant Hill School Site



View northwest with county road in foreground; undated



View northeast, probably March 1931



View west with county road in foreground, 2012

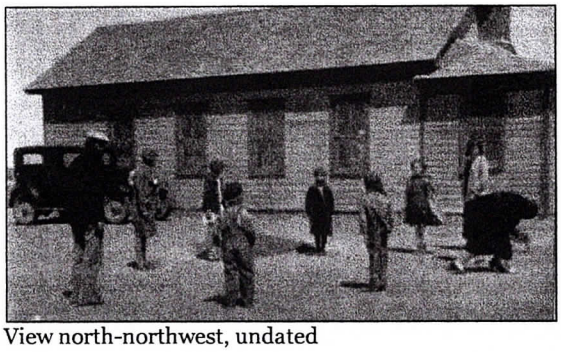
Resource: Pleasant Hill School, site, Kiowa County Road 77 (west side between County Roads D and B), Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 3.

Moved: No

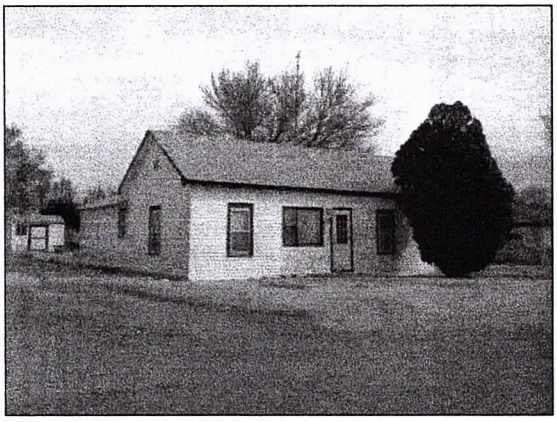
Survey Priority Ranking: Medium

Discussion: The school consisted of two one-room schoolhouses and two outhouses serving Pleasant Hill School District No. 17. The larger building to the north (see historic photos) housed grades 1 through 6 while the smaller southern building accommodated grades 7 and 8. The site has been plowed farmland for more than half a century. No surface indications of the presence of the school buildings are visible in 2012.

Pleasant Hill School Buildings



View north-northwest, undated



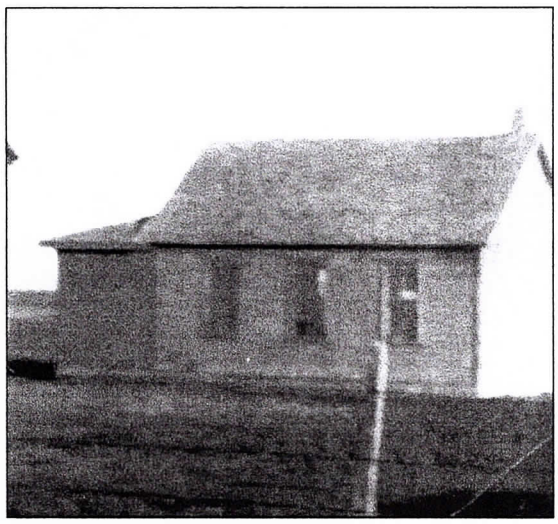
View southeast, 2012

Resource: Pleasant Hill School (north building-grades 1 through 6) (pre-1931), building, 340 North 10th Street, Holly, Prowers County, Resource 4.

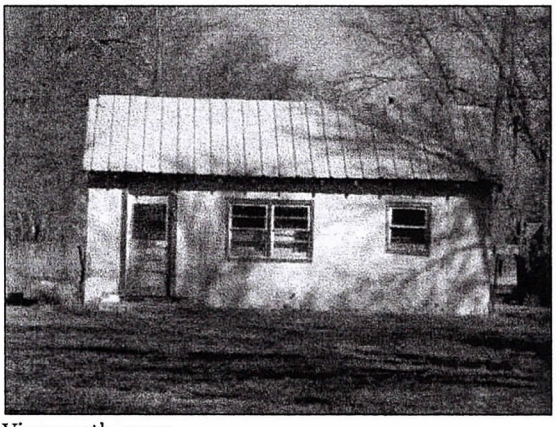
Moved: Yes

Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: The building to the north housed grades 1 through 6. After the school ceased operating in the 1940s, both buildings were moved to Holly. According to local historian Jesse Melton, the building housing the lower grades is now used as a house owned by Irene Beaman. The house is considerably altered, with modifications to window and door openings, a rear (east) addition, and carport to the south. As one of the few buildings strongly associated with the tragedy, the school possesses added significance despite its alterations.



View south-southeast, undated



View north, 2012

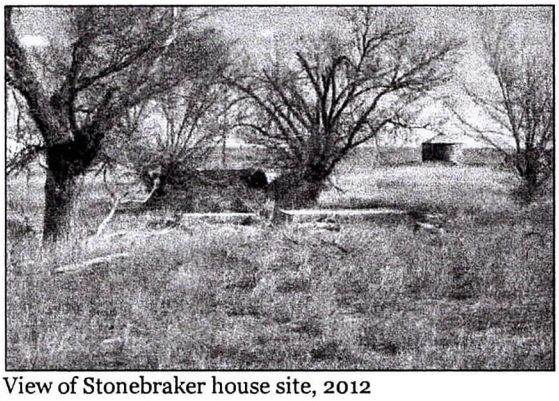
Resource: Pleasant Hill School (south building-grades 7 and 8) (pre-1931), building, 1008 West Colorado Street, Holly, Prowers County, Resource 5.

Moved: Yes

Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: According to local historian Jesse Melton, the school district moved the building housing the upper grades to the Pleasant Hill School site in 1930. It was originally located about two miles east-southeast and known as the New Hope School. After the Pleasant Hill facility closed in the 1940s, the building was moved to Holly, where it is one of the buildings on the parcel occupied by the Church of the Nazarene. It now has stucco walls, metal roofing, and changes to door and window openings. The hipped roof section is not present. As one of the few buildings strongly associated with the tragedy, the school possesses added significance despite its alterations.

Houses of Students on the Bus



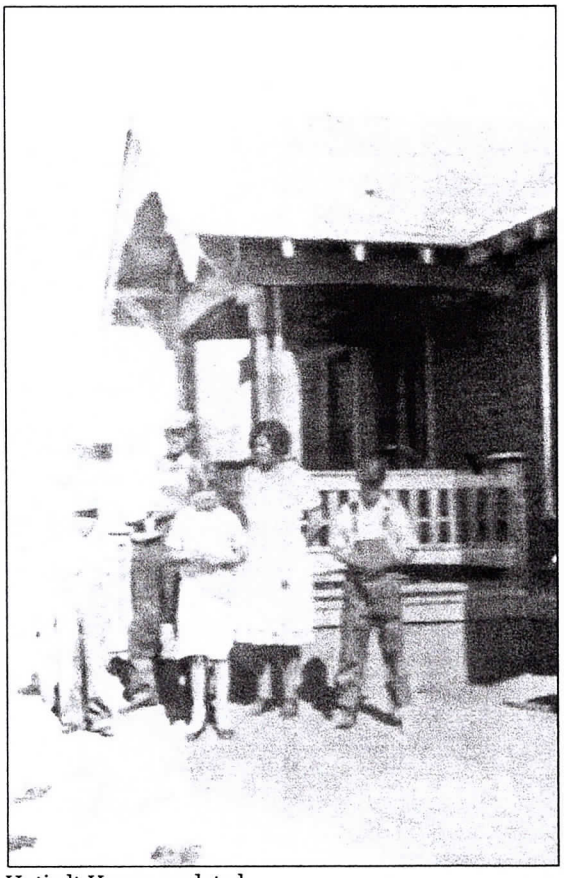
View of Stonebraker house site, 2012

Resource: Stonebraker House, site, Kiowa County Roads 79 and C (southeast corner, about 2.1 miles east of Pleasant Hill School), Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 6.

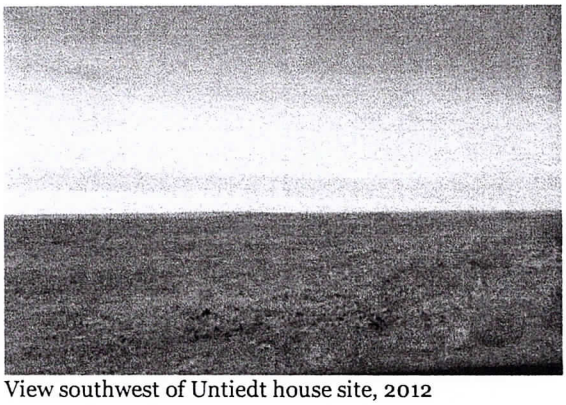
Moved: Unknown

Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: Two Stonebraker children rode the bus that day: Louise, the first to die, and Blanche, who survived the ordeal. The site contains remnants of a concrete foundation, a collapsed building, bricks, and a few stunted trees. A newer metal granary and shed are also present. Of all of the student house locations, only the Stonebraker site still contains some evidence that a house once stood there.



Untiedt House, undated



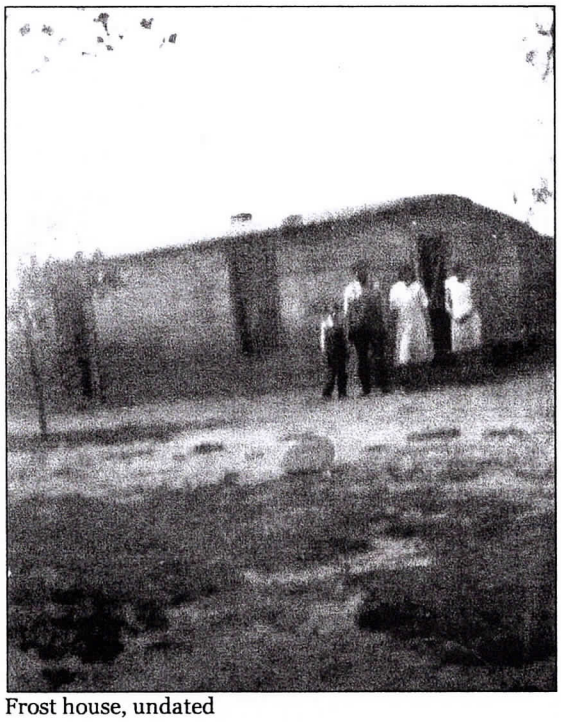
View southwest of Untiedt house site, 2012

Resource: Untiedt House, site, Kiowa County Road 78 (west side, halfway between Kiowa County Roads C and D, about 1.1 miles northeast of Pleasant Hill School), Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 7.

Moved: Unknown

Survey Priority Ranking: Low

Discussion: Students on the bus came from farmsteads in Colorado and Kansas within a radius of approximately 4 miles of Pleasant Hill School. The Unteidt family had four students on the bus, Arlo, who died, and Bryan, Evelyn, and Ome, who survived. The *Denver Post* anointed Bryan as the hero of the tragedy, and President Herbert Hoover later honored him at the White House. Local historian Jesse Melton had heard the Untiedt house might have been moved to Holly, but could not provide details. The house is no longer present at its original site; the land appears to be fallow or used for grazing, with no evidence of the presence of a house or construction debris. Aerial photographs dating to 1989 showed plowed fields here.



Frost house, undated



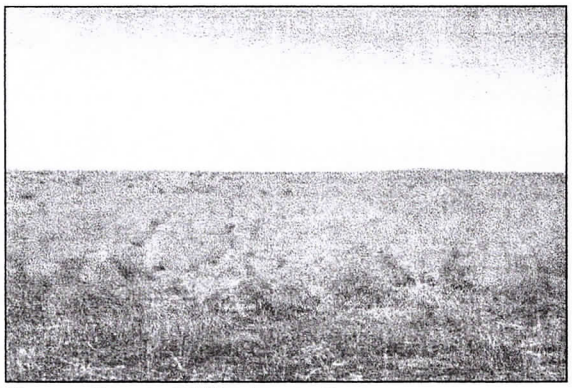
View northeast, 2012

Resource: Frost House, site, Kiowa County Roads 79 and B (northeast corner, about 2.4 miles east-southeast of Pleasant Hill School), Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 8.

Moved: Unknown

Survey Priority Ranking: Low

Discussion: Eunice and Leland Frost were on the school bus; both survived. The house is no longer standing. Present today at the site is a small rectangular reservoir with raised earth banks, with plowed fields to the north and east. Aerial photographs from 1988 through 2010 show the same land uses.



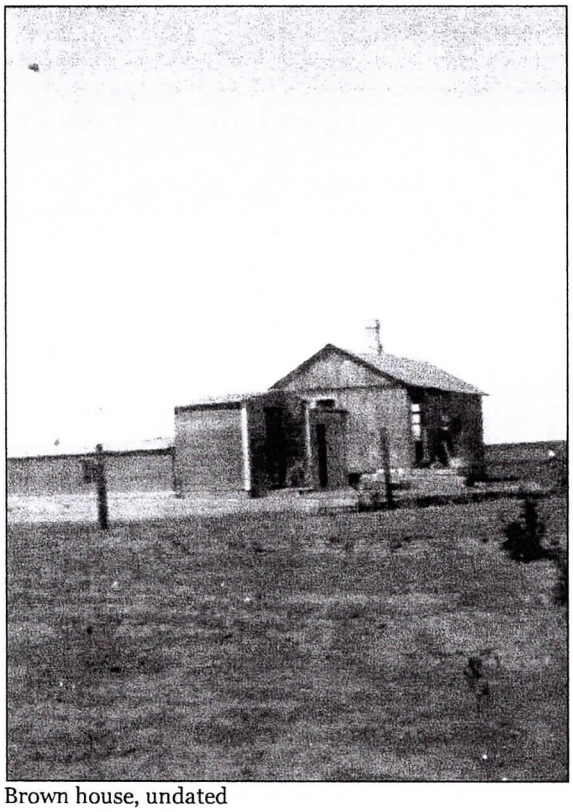
View northeast of Miller house site, 2012

Resource: Miller House, site, Kiowa County Roads 78 and C (northeast corner, about 1.1 miles east of Pleasant Hill School), Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 9.

Moved: Unknown

Survey Priority Ranking: Low

Discussion: Carl Miller, the driver of the ill-fated bus, and his daughter, Mary Louise, both died in the incident. The house is no longer present. The site consists of plowed fields, a situation existing since at least 1988.



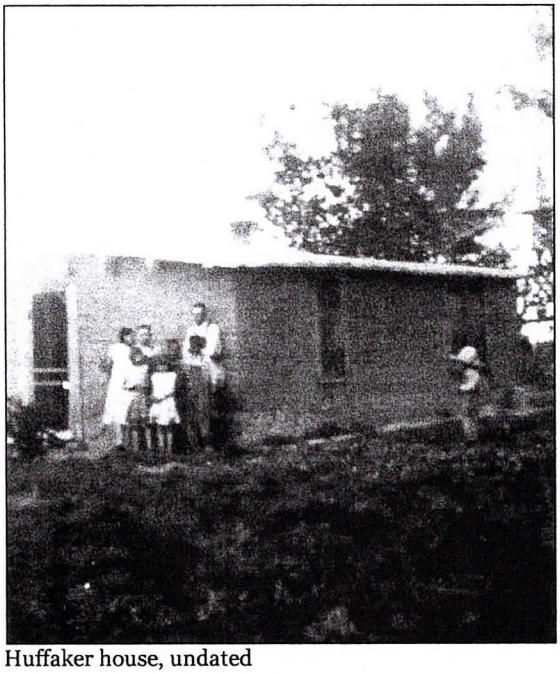
Brown house, undated

Resource: Brown House, site, Greeley County Road DD (north side, about 0.5 miles east of the Colorado-Kansas state line and 4 miles east-southeast of the Pleasant Hill School), Towner vicinity, Greeley County, Kansas, Resource 10.

Moved: Unknown

Survey Priority Ranking: Low

Discussion: The Browns were one of three Kansas families that sent their children to Pleasant Hill School. Three of the children were on the bus: Bobbie, who died, and Rosemary and Maxine, who survived. Based on a 2010 aerial photograph of the area, the house is no longer present. Today, the site is plowed fields, a situation prevailing since at least 1988.



Huffaker house, undated



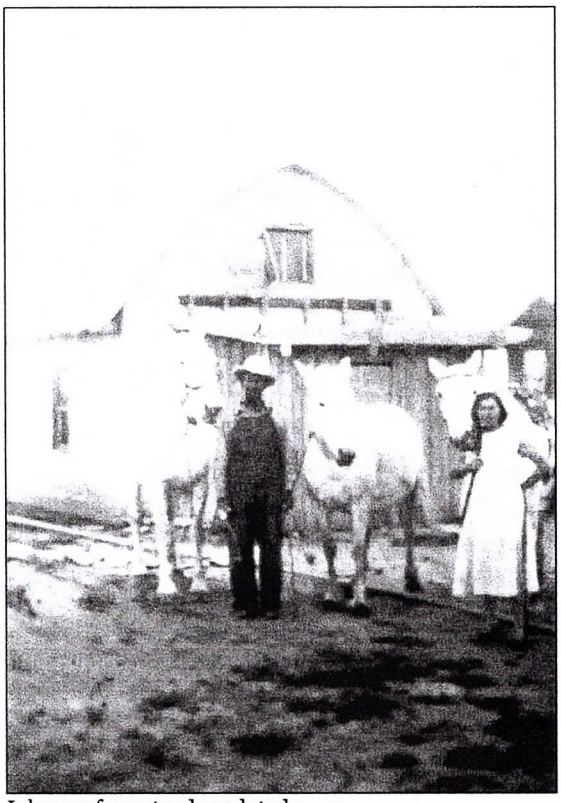
View east of Huffaker site, 2012

Resource: Huffaker House, site, Greeley County Roads DD and 1 (northwest corner, on the Colorado-Kansas state line, about 3.6 miles east-southeast of the Pleasant Hill School), Greeley County, Kansas, Resource 11.

Moved: Unknown

Survey Priority Ranking: Low

Discussion: Six children of the Huffaker family (Alice, Charley, Carl, Max, Lena, and Laura) of Kansas were on the bus; all survived. The house is no longer present. The site is now occupied by a large farmstead that includes both sides of County Road DD. The headquarters area includes a post World War II main house (pictured), several metal outbuildings, and an extensive windbreak area.



Johnson farmstead, undated



View north-northeast toward site from intersection of Kiowa County Roads B and 80, 2012

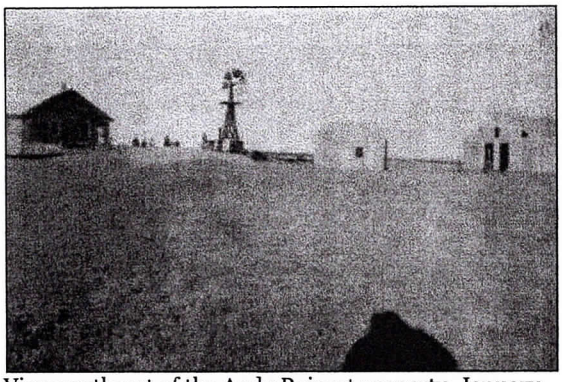
Resource: Johnson House, site, Greeley County Road 1 (east side, on Colorado-Kansas state line, about 1.5 miles north of Greeley County Road DD and 3.4 miles east of Pleasant Hill School), Towner vicinity, Greeley County, Kansas, Resource 12.

Moved: Unknown

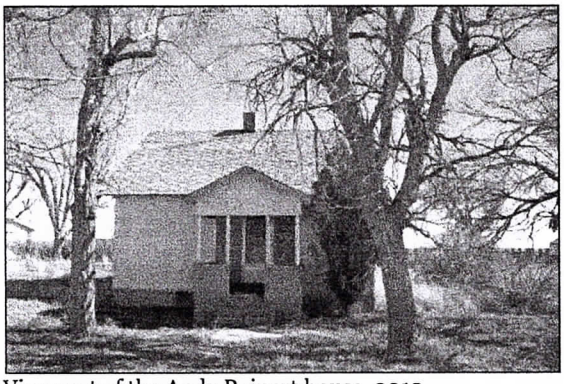
Survey Priority Ranking: Low

Discussion: The Johnsons were one of three Kansas families who sent children to the Pleasant Hill School, as it was closer than schools in their own state. Their son, Kenneth, died on the bus. The house is no longer present. The site is not accessible by road; based on a 2010 aerial photograph the site consists of what appears to be grazing land, a situation existing since at least 1988.

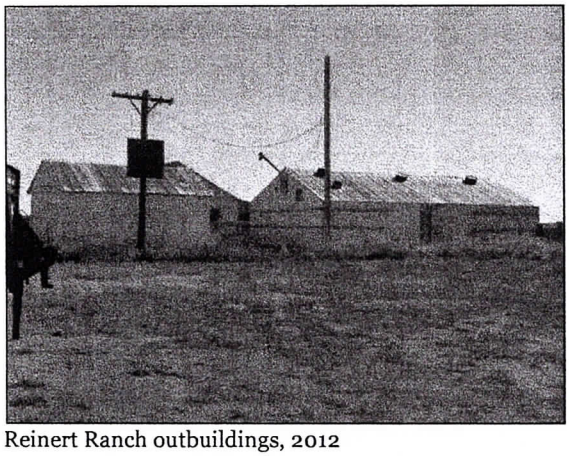
Andy Reinert House



View southeast of the Andy Reinert property, January 1928



View east of the Andy Reinert house, 2012



Reinert Ranch outbuildings, 2012

Resource: Andy Reinert House (1925), County Road B (south side, about 0.5 miles south and 0.5 miles east of tragedy site; 0.5 mis. east of Colorado 78), building, Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 13.

Moved: No

Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: Survivors of the tragedy were brought to the Andy Reinert Ranch, the nearest shelter, where they were warmed and fed. Two planes from Denver and Lamar landed in the field north of the house to transport the surviving children to the hospital in Lamar. The Reinert house was constructed in about 1925 with poured concrete walls. It still stands and is owned by the family. Walls are now clad with stucco and there is an addition on the rear. Other farm buildings present at the time of the tragedy are also extant.

Airplanes Involved in Evacuation



Airplane at left, 1931

Resource: Biplane, structure, whereabouts unknown, Resource 14.

Moved: Yes

Survey Priority Ranking: Medium

Discussion: On 28 March 1931 two airplanes transported the most critically injured surviving children from the Reinert place to Lamar, the site of the Charles Maxwell Hospital. Charles Maxwell dispatched one of the aircraft, an open biplane piloted by Lamar area amateur aviator Jack Hart. He returned to Lamar with two children and a nurse. Its current whereabouts are unknown.



"Injured child" being loaded into the cabin at the Reinert Farm, 1931 (the scene was staged).

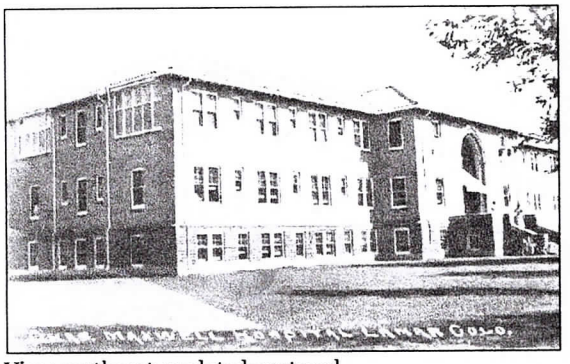
Resource: "The Fawn" (a Fokker aircraft), structure, whereabouts unknown, Resource 15.

Moved: Yes

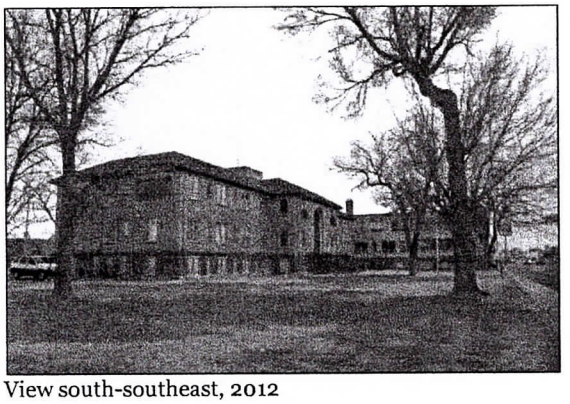
Survey Priority Ranking: Medium

Discussion: The second airplane came from Denver, sent by Frederick G. Bonfils, publisher of the *Denver Post*. Eddie Brooks piloted "The Fawn," a Fokker aircraft with an enclosed cabin owned by Albert E. Humphreys, Jr. The plane carried two mechanics and a reporter and photographer from the *Post*. The plane carried three children, a nurse, and Bud Untiedt to Lamar. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

Charles Maxwell Hospital



View southeast, undated postcard



View south-southeast, 2012

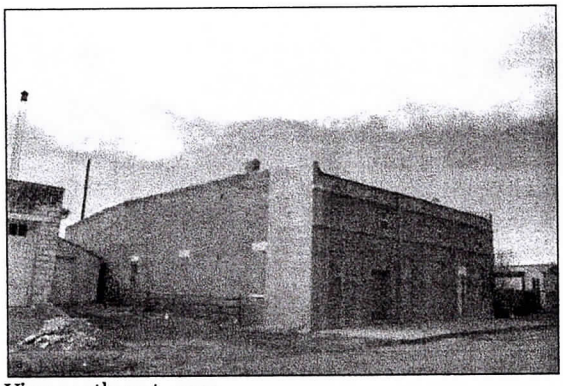
Resource: Charles Maxwell Hospital (1928), building, 1001 S. Main Street (southeast corner of East Cedar Street and South Main Street), Lamar, Prowers County, Colorado, Resource 16.

Moved: No

Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: The surviving children were brought by airplane from the Reinert house to Lamar for medical treatment at the 1928 Charles Maxwell Hospital, the closest facility capable of dealing with the situation. In 1978, a new hospital was constructed in a different location and this building ceased hospital functions. It now houses the Prowers County Public Health and Social Services departments. The building features a large southern wing built after 1931 and a more recent addition on the east, as well as closure of the former main entrance on the west and other alterations.

Colorado National Guard Armory (Holly)



View northwest, 2012

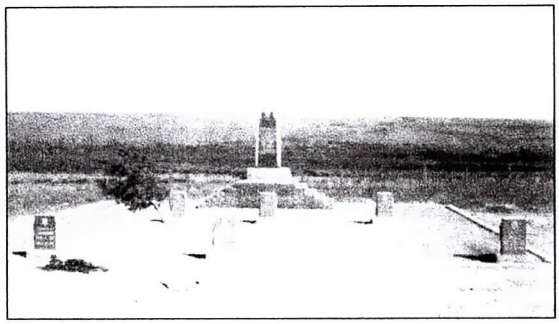
Resource: Colorado National Guard Armory (1912-13), building, South 3rd Street (west side, between East Cheyenne and East Colorado streets), Holly, Prowers County, Colorado, Resource 17.

Moved: No

Survey Priority Ranking: Medium

Discussion: The Holly Colorado National Guard Armory, the town's largest suitable facility, served as a morgue for the tragedy victims and as the site of the joint funeral service. The brick building (no longer an armory) still stands, although the front portion is now covered with stucco and some windows have been filled in. No historic views could be located.

Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Burial Plot and Monument



View east, _____



View southeast, 2012

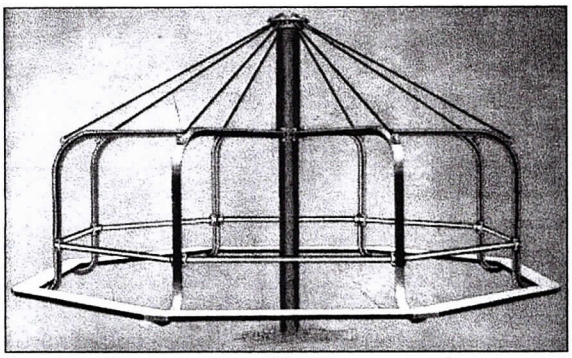
Resource: Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Burial Plot and Monument (1931), site, Holly Cemetery, Cemetery Road (Prowers County Road FF), about 1 mile northeast of town, Holly vicinity, Prowers County, Colorado, Resource 18.

Moved: No

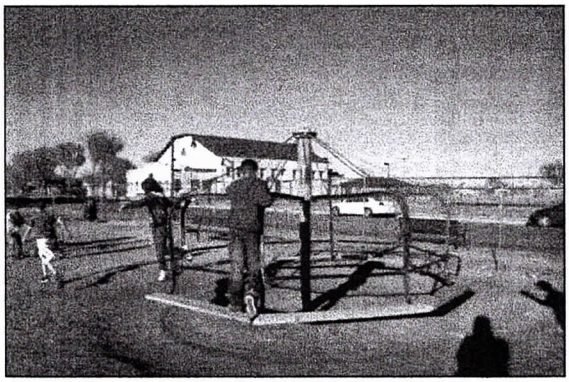
Survey Priority Ranking: High

Discussion: The burial plot and monument are located in Holly Cemetery, 1st Addition, Block 2, Plots 449 and 450. The five students and bus driver who lost their lives in the tragedy were buried here in March 1931. The grassy, concrete-bordered plot was sized to permit additional burials of other students on the bus who survived the blizzard and parents of students. The tall monument to the east, dedicated 7 October 1931, includes a time capsule and was "erected by friends and sympathizers, sponsored by the I.O.O.F." Several later burials are now present in the plot.

Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Commemorative Merry-Go-Round



Drawing of merry-go-round in Karymor catalogue, 1931



View northeast, 2012

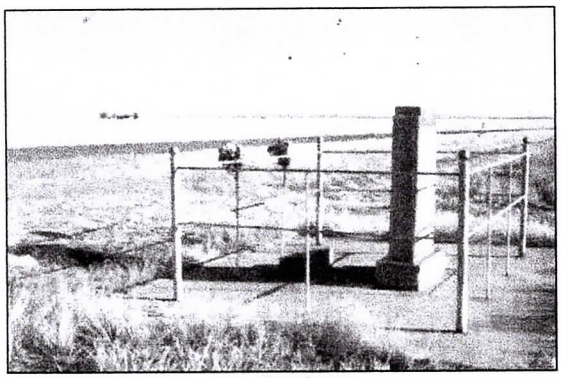
Resource: Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Commemorative Merry-Go-Round (ca. 1931), structure, 201 North Main Street (west side, in the playground of Shanner Elementary School), Holly, Prowers County, Colorado, Resource 19.

Moved: No

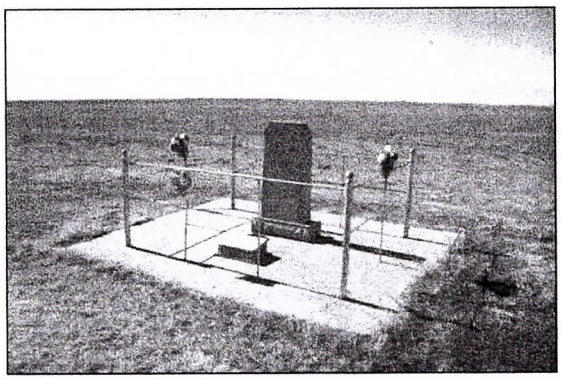
Survey Priority Ranking: Medium

Discussion: Ten Pueblo businesses funded the installation ca. 1931 of a Karymor Merry-Go-Round at the elementary school playground in Holly. A plaque on the center pole contains a dedication to "the 1931 heroes of Pleasant Hill School District No. 17, Kiowa County, Colorado" and lists the names of the businesses funding the project. The historic drawing is from the 1931 Karymor catalogue, produced by R.F. Lamar and Company, Pueblo. Longtime Holly resident Nola Mae Ice indicated the merry-go-round has always been in this location.

Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy Monument



View south-southeast, undated



View west-southwest, 2012

Resource: The Pleasant Hill Bus Tragedy Monument (1962), object, 5KW.32, Kiowa County Road 78 (west side between County Roads D and B; about 14 miles south of Towner and 17 miles north of Holly or 1.6 miles north of the Kiowa-Prowers county line), Towner vicinity, Kiowa County, Resource 20.

Moved: No

Survey Priority Ranking: Medium

Discussion: The Towner and Holly Lions Clubs installed the monument in April 1962 at a public ceremony attended by Colorado Lieutenant Governor Robert Lee Knous. In addition to the principal vertical granite marker the monument incorporated a small poured concrete marker with a slanted top installed by Carl Miller's brother, Oscar, at the site ca. 1931.

6
PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Prioritization of Resources

Using published sources and information provided by local residents, this project identified twenty resources associated with the Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy of 1931. Based on their degree of association with the tragedy and historic physical integrity, the resources were classified as high, medium, or low for future intensive survey work (see Table 1). Resources with the most direct ties to the tragedy event were given a higher priority than those with a more distant link. For example, the location where the bus stalled is rated high, whereas the commemorative merry-go-round is only rated medium. Generally, sites with no physical remains are rated low, such as the school site and the sites once holding homes of students on the bus.

The nine resources rated high include: the Pleasant Hill bus, site where the bus stalled, the two Pleasant Hill School buildings in Holly, the Stonebraker House site, the Andy Reinert place, Charles Maxwell Hospital in Lamar, Holly Colorado National Guard Armory, and the Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 burial plot and monument in Holly Cemetery. The whereabouts of the bus and the two aircraft are presently unknown. They may no longer exist or be located in distant states, factors making their inclusion in the survey problematic.

Five resources are prioritized as medium: the Pleasant Hill School site; the two airplanes involved in the rescue; the commemorative merry-go-round in Holly; and the Pleasant Hill School District Bus Tragedy Monument between Holly and Towner.

Six properties are assessed as having a low priority for future intensive survey work: the sites previously containing the houses of children on the bus.

Intensive Survey Recommendations

As a first step, it is recommended the eight resources assessed as having a high priority whose locations are known be intensively surveyed. A historic archaeologist should participate in the survey of the Stonebraker site which does not contain standing buildings. If the location of the bus can be ascertained, then it, too, should be intensively surveyed, if feasible, given distance and associated expenses.

As a second step, the three resources evaluated as medium priority whose locations are known should be surveyed. If the present whereabouts of the two airplanes are determined, then consideration should be given to surveying them as well, if feasible, given distance and associated expenses.

It is not recommended that the six resources assessed as low priority be intensively surveyed. This group includes the remaining locations of the homes of the students on the bus. The sites contain no standing resources and have been used for crop raising or grazing for more than a quarter of a century.

Funding for the intensive survey might be pursued through Certified Local Government grants, State Historical Fund grants, or private funding.

Table 1
PLEASANT HILL SCHOOL BUS TRAGEDY
HISTORIC RESOURCES WITH SURVEY PRIORITY RANKING, ARRANGED BY RESOURCE NUMBER

Resource Number	Resource	Location	Survey Priority
1	Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Bus	Unknown	High
2	Pleasant Hill School Bus Tragedy Site	Pleasant Hill vicinity	High
3	Pleasant Hill School Site	Pleasant Hill vicinity	Medium
4	Pleasant Hill School building (grades 1-6, north building)	Holly, Prowers County, Colorado	High
5	Pleasant Hill School building (grades 7-8, south building)	Holly, Prowers County, Colorado	High
6	Stonebraker House site	Pleasant Hill vicinity	High
7	Untiedt House site	Pleasant Hill vicinity	Low
8	Frost House site	Pleasant Hill vicinity	Low
9	Miller House site	Pleasant Hill vicinity	Low
10	Brown House site	Pleasant Hill vicinity, Greeley County, Kansas	Low
11	Huffaker House site	Pleasant Hill vicinity, Greeley County, Kansas	Low
12	Johnson House site	Pleasant Hill vicinity, Greeley County, Kansas	Low
13	Andy Reinert House	Pleasant Hill vicinity	High
14	Biplane of Jack Hart	Unknown	Medium
15	"The Fawn" (Fokker aircraft)	Unknown	Medium
16	Charles Maxwell Hospital	Lamar, Prowers County, Colorado	High
17	Colorado National Guard Armory	Holly, Prowers County, Colorado	High
18	Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Burial Plot and Monument	Holly Cemetery, Holly vicinity, Prowers County, Colorado	High
19	Pleasant Hill School District No. 17 Commemorative Merry-Go-Round	Holly, Prowers County, Colorado	Medium
20	Pleasant Hill School District Bus Tragedy Monument (5KW.32)	Pleasant Hill Vicinity	Medium

NOTE: All resources are in Kiowa County unless otherwise indicated.

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