

** The bus accident detailed below is among the deadliest traffic accidents in Colorado history. As a result of this accident, federal legislation was passed by Congress requiring the drivers of certain commercial vehicles, including school buses, to stop, look, and listen for a train at all railroad tracks prior to crossing the tracks.*

20 Children Killed as Passenger Train Hits School Bus East of Evans

16 Others injured as City of Denver Plows Into Greeley School Dist. Bus

Reprinted courtesy of the Greeley Tribune, Dec. 14, 1961

“This is information from the front page of the Dec. 14, 1961, Greeley Tribune after a tragic bus accident killed 20 children and injured 16. The tragedy immediately plunged the Greeley farming community into shock. The driver of the bus, 23-year-old Duane Harms, was arrested of involuntary manslaughter and was forced to endure threats and crank calls and letters. Harms was found not guilty and immediately left Greeley with his wife and baby. Friends say he moved to California. His ties to Greeley were severed forever.”

Twenty school children were killed Thursday morning in a tragic school bus-train collision two miles east and a mile south of Evans.

The accident involving a Greeley School District (No. 6) bus, was the worst in the Greeley area’s history.

Bodies of the victims were taken to the old Armory on 8th Ave. Last time the Armory was used as a morgue was when the plane bombed by John Gilbert Graham crashed in southwest Weld County.

Sixteen youngsters were rushed to Weld County General Hospital by ambulance and private automobiles. Seventeen doctors were called into action to handle the emergencies at the hospital.

The bus carried 38 and the driver.

The school bus was carrying students to Delta School, east of Greeley, Arlington Elementary School, Meeker Junior High School and Greeley High School.

Law enforcement officers barred admittance to the hastily prepared morgue, where white sheets covered the 20 victims.

The accident occurred about 8:30 a.m. at an open, but diagonal crossing.

The school bus, driven by Duane Harms, rolled onto the track first, and the westbound Union Pacific streamliner, City of Denver, No. 111, smashed into it at the rear.

Bus Carried Over 100 Yards

The impact carried the huge 60-passenger bus down the tracks more than 60 yards. The hood, engine, wheels and parts of the passenger section were ripped to shreds.

The engineer was Herbert Sommers of Denver. The crash did little damage to the train.

Speed limit for trains in that area is 79 miles an hour. The train was reported preparing to slow down prior to arriving in La Salle. *(end of text available)*

Parents Assemble At Courthouse to Give Identification

The grim process of helping to identify victims of the bus-train disaster southeast of Evans was begun shortly after 11 a.m. Thursday in the district courtroom on the fourth floor of the Weld County Courthouse.

Parents of children aboard the ill-fated bus were called to the courthouse to give Weld County officials information on what their children were wearing or other items of identification.

Stenographers Take Information

The information taken by stenographers Betty Pryor, Barbara Adams and Susan Fahey was quickly shuttled to the old Armory by Greeley police.

Tragedy Attracts Nationwide Concern

The accident immediately brought national concern. Within an hour after the mishap the Tribune received calls from the New York Post, a Chicago radio station, the London Daily Express, Life Magazine and a Montreal, Canada, radio station, seeking details of the tragedy.

Denver area newsmen swarmed over the scene.

The Greeley Fire Department set up emergency equipment in the lobby of the Courthouse, while three members of American Red Cross offered assistance to the grief-stricken but hopeful parents.

Red Cross Gives Aid

Chairman of the Red Cross disaster committee is Mrs. Gay Benson, who lives in the Ennes Dairy, last stop on the route of the bus.

Mrs. Benson rushed to the old armory building to offer help, but was asked to go to the Courthouse. She, Marie Geisler and Louise Taylor were on duty at the Courthouse throughout the day.