THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN OF BATH:

MEDIA AND MEMORY OF THE BATH SCHOOL BOMBING OF 1927

by

AMIE MARSH JONES

(Under the Direction of Janice Hume)

ABSTRACT

In 1927, in the small township of Bath, Michigan, Andrew P. Kehoe planted more than 600 pounds of dynamite and pyrotol in Bath Consolidated School. The explosions killed 45 people, including 38 children, and injured dozens more. The Bath disaster remains the deadliest act of school violence in the United States, yet many Americans have never heard of it or of Kehoe. This event, while remembered by Bath residents, has been largely ignored by national media – rarely publicly acknowledged, recognized, or memorialized. The Bath disaster contradicts the misconception that school mass murders are a modern phenomenon.

This dissertation explores era and subsequent news coverage of the Bath disaster, as well as memory sites, via both historic media and archives, in an attempt to understand media's role in collective memory of the Bath tragedy of 1927. It considers how coverage of this early disaster might fit into the overall press narrative of mass murders in schools. A combination of media behavior, the tendency of traumatic memory to silence survivors, and other events and characteristics of the era ultimately proved potent in creating a lasting atmosphere of collective forgetting of the Bath disaster.

INDEX WORDS: journalism history, mass murder, Bath, Michigan, Andrew Kehoe, collective memory, public memory, 1920s, school shootings, terrorism

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every victim, in every generation, of the Bath Consolidated School tragedy of 1927.

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Organizing my thoughts on the various people who deserve my heartfelt thanks during this dissertation journey has taken me almost as long as one of these chapters. A multitude of things had to come together just right for this to work as well as it did; there were synchronicities along the way which guided me throughout my research. For this, I am forever grateful. With any feat, there are people surrounding you who fuel your inner drive, there are those who assist you outwardly with practical matters necessary to complete your goal, and there are those who have paved the way before you who made your endeavor possible. While these categories are not mutually exclusive, I will try my best to address each.

My love for writing and analyzing began in a high school English class taught by Dr. Charles Hawkins, so I must acknowledge him. Without this early spark, my academic career might have meandered differently. Today, I have a wonderful family who supports me – two beautiful children and a loving husband. They inspire me every day to be my best. I am also blessed with fantastic parents and in-laws who are a vital support to all four of us.

This work is certainly not possible without the assistance and support that I received from the wonderful people of Bath Township. Much gratitude goes to Ron and Johanna Balzer who, not only invited me as a guest into their home, but also kept me alerted to memorial activity in town and connected me to other second-generation survivors. I continue to enjoy our conversations and consider them friends. I am indebted to the founders and committee members of the Bath School Museum; special thanks to Sue Hagerman and Dean Sweet, Jr. Other institutions which made my research possible include: University of Georgia Library, Dewitt District Public Library, Library of Michigan, Clinton County Historical Society, and the Local History division of the Lansing District

Public Library (thank you, Heidi Butler). I received significant help from two exceptional individuals at Sparrow Hospital's Health Sciences Library in Lansing – librarians Michael Simmons and Laura Smith. The hospital that provided the greatest help to the injured children back in 1927 also ended up being extremely helpful exactly 90 years later when Johanna and I wandered in there on May 18, 2017. I am grateful to Laura's father, Theodore Dixon, now 92 years old, who just a few days prior to my library visit, gifted his photos of the Bath disaster to Laura, which were then able to be shared with me.

I am thankful for the authors who have written books about the Bath tragedy, beginning with the original one, Monty Ellsworth, who penned *The Bath School Disaster* in 1927; also, Grant Parker, Gene Wilkins, Betty Spencer, Arnie Bernstein, and Dawn Hawks. I particularly want to recognize Arnie Bernstein and documentarian Matt Martyn. Both Arnie and Matt interviewed survivors in the early to mid-2000s, a time when those remaining began to realize that if they did not talk, no one would. Without their efforts, much first-hand memory of the disaster would be lost. In addition, Arnie donated his research and interview materials to the Local History division of the Lansing District Public Library, making it possible for future researchers like me to access them. And, both Arnie and Matt are always willing to answer my questions and engage in discussion.

Last, but certainly not least, is my academic advisory committee at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. Throughout my dissertation, I have been guided and counseled by Dr. Janice Hume. In her journalism history course in 2013, I learned that not everything in the field of journalism has to be qualitative or quantitative – that some of us can focus historically, opening up a whole new world of research potential. Not only is Dr. Hume a master of history, memory, and journalism, she is also kind, engaging, and patient. Great appreciation also goes to the rest of my committee: Dr. Mark Cooney, Dr. Barry Hollander, Dr. Peggy Kreshel, and Dr. Karen Russell. Dr. Hollander passed away before he could see this day. He will forever remain

one of my favorite Grady professors. I know he is now making witty comments to his comrades high above us. I am thankful to have had such a well-rounded and supportive advisory committee team. I am filled with gratitude for all of the people I mention here and also to any that have helped me along thus far in all my undertakings and adventures.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1927, in the small farming community of Bath, Michigan, Andrew P. Kehoe, former township clerk and then handyman of Bath Consolidated School, worked painstakingly planting explosives in the school over a period of several weeks. He placed more than 600 pounds of dynamite in the floors of classrooms and in basement crawl spaces, all wired via an alarm clock to erupt at 8:45 a.m. CST, when the school had 236 children and adults present.[1] At some point between May 16 and 18, he murdered his wife. In the early morning hours of May 18, he tied her body to a hog cart, blew up his farm, home, and livestock, and then drove his dynamite-loaded Ford pickup to the school in order to view the carnage.

As he arrived, he saw his plan was only partially successful. A short in his electrical wiring had spared the south wing. He called the superintendent of the school, Emory Huyck, a man he despised, over to his truck. Kehoe then fired his rifle at the dynamite in the back seat, exploding his truck and killing himself, Huyck, and three others, including an 8-year-old boy who had managed to

[1] David Kim, et al., "A Modern Analysis of a Historical Pediatric Disaster: The 1927 Bath School Bombing," *Journal of Surgical Research* 163, (2010), 311; Mike Mayo, *American Murder* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2008), 175. As era journalists covered the Bath disaster, some reported that the initial blast occurred at 8:45 a.m.; others reported 9:45 a.m. The reason for this is that the township still operated on Central time, which they often called "railroad time" or "slow time." In the early twentieth century, many Michigan cities utilized Central time. In 1918, however, Congress passed the Standard Time Act, placing Bath in the Eastern time zone. Bath though largely ignored this change and continued to operate on CST. This caused discrepancies across newspaper accounts. As found in: "Witnesses give blast versions," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 1; Julie Mack, "22 Things you may not know about the 1927 Bath School Massacre," *MLive Media Group*, May 18, 2017.

survive the first blast. The final count was 45 killed, including 38 children, and an additional 58 injured.[2] Most of the dead and injured were children under the age of twelve.

Bath remains the deadliest act of school violence in the United States.[3] Yet, many Americans have never heard of Bath or of Andrew Kehoe.[4] This event, while remembered by Bath residents, some of whom are descendants of survivors, has been largely ignored by American media – rarely publicly acknowledged, recognized, or memorialized. It contradicts the misconception that school mass murders are a modern phenomenon. This study aims to explore era coverage of the Bath disaster, as well as memory sites, via both historic media and archives, in an attempt to understand media's role in collective memory (or collective amnesia) of the Bath tragedy of 1927.

A number of researchers have tracked the evolution of coverage of school mass murders beginning with the Columbine High School shooting of 1999.[5] This study examines era news coverage of the Bath disaster and considers how it may fit into the overall press narrative of mass murders in schools. It sheds light on how media have covered mass murders historically and upon the overall operation of the press in the 1920s, an understudied era in journalism history. The cultural context of the era can aide us in understanding media's place within it.

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[2] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Clinton County, Michigan. It is important to note that the 45 killed includes Kehoe himself. Many in Bath did not count Kehoe, so some media reports stated a death toll of 44 resulting from the events of May 18, 1927.

[3] Mike Mayo, *American Murder* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2008), 175.

[4] While the Bath disaster can be found in news coverage, it is rare and one has to dig deep to find it. The fact that it is covered so rarely by mass media likely contributes to it not being widely known. "Worst-ever school attack forgotten," *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1999, A18; "'27 Michigan bloodbath dwarfs even Littleton," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, May 2, 1999, J2; Lisa Hoffman, "VA Tech is not the worst in horrific history of school massacres," *Scripps Howard News Service*, April 16, 2007; "Historical Michigan school tragedy 'worst ever,'" *The Trentonian*, April 24, 2007; Theresa Vargas, "Virginia Tech was not the worst school massacre in U.S. history. This was.," *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2017.

[5] Patricia Leavy and Kathryn Maloney, "American reporting of school violence and 'people like us': A comparison of newspaper coverage of the Columbine and Red Lake School Shootings," *Critical Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2009): 277.

Journalism in the 1920s

The turn of the century brought a change in the nature of news reporting. According to two era surveys which measured space allotted to various types of news, in American newspapers from 1899 to 1923, editorials declined by 77 percent, letters to the editor by 180 percent, and society coverage by 275 percent. Other categories increased – general and political news by 1 percent, business news by 4 percent, and foreign news by 9 percent. But the grandest increases were in the arena of sports news and crime reporting, which increased by an impressive 47 percent and 58 percent respectively. At the same time, advertising increased by 47 percent and illustrations by 84 percent.[6] Beginning in 1920, news, entertainment and music of the day was ushered straight into American homes courtesy of a new medium – radio. Newspapers exclaimed sensationalistic stories of crime and celebrities.[7]

Of particular interest to the newspaper-reading public were murder trials. Charles Merz called these legal proceedings in 1927 "our literature," "the cradle of our folklore," and our "Roman circus."[8] He said that a famous murder trial was "no longer a startling interruption of a more lethargic train of thought," but instead "an institution as periodic in its public appearances and reappearances as the cycle of the seasons."[9] With the single exception of Charles Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, newspapers had their largest average circulation during intensive murder trial coverage, with the single best days being when verdicts were announced or executions carried out.[10]

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[6] Silas Bent, "The Art of Ballyhoo," *Harper's Monthly*, September 1927, 485-494.
[7] Charles Shindo, *1927 and the Rise of Modern America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 138.
[8] Charles Merz, "Bigger and Better Murders," *Harper's Monthly*, August 1927, 341-343. Charles Merz was an influential journalist and editorialist in the 1920s. He went on to become the Editorial Page Editor of *The New York Times* from 1938 until his retirement in 1961. Merz wrote editorials that greatly influenced American thinking for more than two decades. From: John McQuiston, "Charles Merz, a former *Times* editor, is dead at 84," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1977, 40.
[9] Ibid., 341.
[10] John Brazil, "Murder trials, murder, and twenties America," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 163-184.

In addition to murder trials, news in the 1920s was dominated by sports and news of movie stars and celebrities. Fascination with these matters can at least partially be traced back to 1919 when Robert McCormick and Joseph Patterson began the New York *Illustrated Daily News*. Following their success, William Randolph Hearst launched the New York *Daily Mirror,* and Bernard McFadden started the *Evening Graphic*. By 1926, these three newspapers had a combined daily circulation of more than 1.35 million. These tabloids birthed a new newspaper audience, one that sought entertainment more than information. The first editorial of the *Daily News* on June 26, 1919, proclaimed that the paper "will not be a competitor of the other New York newspapers, for it will cover a field they do not attempt to cover." Similarly, McFadden wrote of the *Graphic*'s intent to "dramatize the news and features," in order to "appeal to the masses in their own language."[11]

Walter Lippman denounced this "publicity machine" in 1927, saying the machine that the press wielded was driven by an engine with an "important peculiarity." "It does not flood the world with light," he said. "On the contrary, it is like the beam of a powerful lantern which plays somewhat capriciously upon the course of events, throwing this and now that into brilliant relief, leaving the rest in comparative darkness." What the public desired most, Lippman said, was stories involving some mystery, as well as love and death. Such sensations had to be timed carefully, he noted, for the public cannot concentrate on two significant events at once.[12]

Similarly, Merz mentioned the public's "supreme fidelity to a single, all-absorbing topic of discussion, enjoying once more a vicarious thrill in other people's vices."[13] Silas Bent compared the press to a retail store which devotes its entire shop window to a single enchanting fur, emphasizing

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[11] Ibid., 163-164.

[12] Walter Lippman, "Blazing publicity: Why we know so much about 'Peaches' Browning, Valentino, Lindbergh, and Queen Marie," in *Vanity Fair: Selections from America's most memorable magazine; A cavalcade of the 1920s and 1930s*, ed. Cleveland Amory and Frederick Bradlee (New York: Viking, 1960), 121.

[13] Merz, 342.

that the press concentrated public attention on a single enthralling news event, even at the expense of more important happenings.[14] Lippman ultimately concluded that a population under modern conditions was no longer held by sustained convictions and traditions, but was instead in need of one thrill after another. "Perhaps the appetite was always there," he said. "But the new publicity engine is peculiarly adapted to feeding it."[15] Merz addressed this issue in 1927 when he queried, "Why shouldn't the press make use of the most sensational and thrilling material in the whole scope of journalism – when it is there for the asking, when the public wants it, when it is part of life, when without it, the news utterly lacks proportion, and when it gives life color (and sells papers)?"[16]

Bath in the 1920s

While Bath, Michigan, was to some extent immune to the most boisterous spirit of the day, some of the more sordid aspects of the era did occur near the township. Scarface himself, Al Capone, grew fond of the area after Chicago prosecutor William McSwiggin was murdered, and Capone and company were under intense scrutiny from law enforcement. Capone took refuge in Lansing for several summers, about 15 miles from Bath, where he would even freely walk around town.[17] He and his companions eventually rented two cottages on picturesque Round Lake located in Laingsburg, Michigan, about nine miles from Bath, where they frequented the popular dance hall, Club Roma.[18]

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[14] Bent, 485.
[15] Lippman, 122.
[16] Merz, 343.
[17] Arnie Bernstein, *Bath Massacre: America's First School Bombing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 17-19. Capone fled to Lansing to seek refuge with a former gang member friend who, after another Chicago murder had gone horribly wrong, had relocated to Lansing and reinvented himself as a legitimate businessman, owning a profitable fruit and vegetable market.

[18] Kathleen Lavey, "1920s," *The Lansing State Journal*, April 28, 2005, SP.33.

Bath was an idyllic and bucolic township in the 1920s; the "roaring 20s" of contraband liquor and bob-haired flappers seemed far away. People knew their neighbors and felt comfortable leaving the doors unlocked day and night. Six trains passed through town daily, carrying produce from local farmers. Approximately 300 people resided in Bath in 1927.[19] Main Street was home to the post office, grain elevator, the railroad depot, Dr. Crum's Pharmacy, a meat market, a general store, and the People's Bank of Bath.[20] Several residents owned Ford automobiles, which they referred to as "machines," but the horse was still used by many for transportation. A blacksmith in Bath was smart to divide up his business and expertise, splitting his time between automobile repairs and shoeing horses. Residents in search of weekend excitement could travel to one of the dance halls just outside of town or to a moving picture show in Lansing. For local and more reserved family outings, Bath's Community Hall served the purpose.[21] It was hard to imagine this township as the site of one of America's worst incidents of mass murder.

Mass Murder and Media

Mass murder is generally defined as an incident in which four or more people are murdered within a 24-hour period of time. Even though mass murder rates were high in the 1920s and 1930s, it was not classified as a new crime until the occurrence of mass shootings increased in the 1960s.[22] The wave of mass murder which occurred in the 1920s and 1930s did not draw as much attention because it consisted mainly of familicides and mobster-related deaths. The 1940s and 1950s were a low period for mass murder, and crime in general, but it was during this time that the phrases "mass killing" and "mass slaying" entered American vocabulary.[23]

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[19] Bernstein, 18.
[20] Gene Wilkins, *My Scrapbook on the Bath School bombing of May 18th 1927* (Bath: Timber Wolf LTD, 2002), 12.
[21] Bernstein, 16-19.
[22] Grant Duwe, "A circle of distortion: The social construction of mass murder in the United States," *Western Criminology Review* 6, no. 1 (2005): 59-78.
[23] Grant Duwe, *Mass Murder in the United States: A History* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2007), 155.

From 1900 to 1965, there were 21 public mass shootings in America; from 1966 to 1999, however, there were 95.[24] While this is certainly an increase worthy of attention, the media's tendency to focus heavily on the most extreme and atypical murders can have the unintended effect of an attentive public increasingly believing that we live in a world in which mass murder is a common, likely occurrence, while it is indeed rare.[25] For example, today there are more than 50 million students enrolled in more than 80,000 schools across America. Taking into account the number of deaths caused by school shootings, the likelihood of any one student falling victim to a shooter is approximately 0.00005 percent. One is statistically more likely to be struck by lightning, yet people continue to be fearful.[26] Mass media's potential overemphasis on rare and sensational mass killings is significant because these events will continue to garner much public attention and hence have a greater impact on the social construction of mass murder.[27]

Media's presentation of rare and sensational occurrences of mass murder could be classified as what Stanley Cohen in 1972 called a "socially constructed moral panic" – a disproportionate reaction to a perceived social threat. These often feature exaggerated claims and intense concerns presented by media, the mass media playing the key role in distributing information to the public. One of the key features of moral panics is that they are volatile – they erupt suddenly, in some cases after a period of dormancy. They can then, just as quickly, subside. Some inspire new legislation or social movements, but some do not. Mass murder or school shootings then can be said to slumber

[24] Grant Duwe, "A circle of distortion: The social construction of mass murder in the United States," 59.
[25] Grant Duwe, "Body-count journalism: The presentation of mass murder in the news media," *Homicide Studies* 4, no. 4 (2000): 364-399.

[26] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities* (Denver: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2016), 58. This statistic is accurate through 2016.
[27] Grant Duwe, "Body-count journalism: The presentation of mass murder in the news media," 364.

within the popular consciousness until a high-profile event reignites awareness of these things as potential social problems.[28]

While murder and other violent crimes are newsworthy, not all murders, including mass murders, are created equal in the eyes of news organizations. What makes one event significant in coverage, even historically significant, and the other just a quick mention on the 6 o'clock news is partially related to the social characteristics of both victim and offender. Sorenson, Manz, and Berk found that crime coverage, including homicide coverage, often varies with the "worthiness" of the victim, with the wealthy, women, Caucasians, the elderly, and children receiving more coverage than those of lower socioeconomic status, men, and minorities. The worthiest victims, they found, are white, in the youngest or oldest age groups, female, of high socioeconomic status, and killed by strangers.[29] Leavy and Maloney deemed a similar effect "People Like Us, or "PLU," implying that the news is reported with white, middle and upper class citizens as the target market.[30]

Sociologists Lin and Phillips found that prominent mass media coverage of capital murder presents a distorted reality in which brutal and rare crimes tend to be committed by minority offenders against vulnerable, "worthy" victims. This can prove intriguing to the public, as it fits the narrative of good people being harmed by the nefarious. When all of the tenets of newsworthiness combine in one case, it becomes a perfect storm of crime newsworthiness. This can create a flurry of coverage, perhaps disproportionate to its overall societal importance and with little, if any, homage to the murder's rarity. Lin and Phillips noted that the public mandate for the death penalty is sustained

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[28] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Abingdon : Routledge, 2011).
[29] Susan Sorenson, Julie Manz, and Richard Berk, "News media coverage and the epidemiology of homicide," *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 10 (1998): 1510-1514.
[30] Patricia Leavy and Kathryn Maloney, "American reporting of school violence and 'People Like Us': A comparison of newspaper coverage of the Columbine and Red Lake school shootings," *Critical Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2009): 273-292.

by atypical, well-publicized crimes that conform to existing cultural expectations of crime. Exceptions, they found, sustain the rule.[31]

Newsworthiness also centers on the overall traits of the event itself. Steven Chermak outlined five key criteria for crime newsworthiness. The first is that the greater the violence, brutality, and heinousness of the crime, the more coverage it will receive. For example, murders involving sexual assault receive more coverage than those without. The second involves the demographics of both victim and perpetrator. The "worthiness" of the victim is integral, and interracial murders receive more coverage than those in which victim and offender are of the same race. Another criterion considers the uniqueness of the event, with the more unusual events receiving more coverage. For example, mass murders with an unusually high death toll or unusual methods will receive more coverage. Lastly, event salience matters as well, such as local proximity of media to the event.[32] The media coverage that the Bath disaster received will shed light on the perceived newsworthiness of the event itself and its victims in 1927.

Journalists seek to cover incidents that have journalistic and commercial value to their particular audience. Such events are both perceived and constructed as socially significant.[33] Arthur Neal notes that events likely to be perceived as collective traumas are considered highly newsworthy. This is because they are considered social disruptions and therefore their newsworthiness is likely to go unquestioned by the public. "It is the disruption of everyday life that constitutes the newsworthy event," Neal writes. "Something unexpected has occurred, and adjustments are required to changing

[31] Jeffrey Lin and Scott Phillips, "Media coverage of capital murder: Exceptions sustain the rule," *Justice Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (2014): 934-959.
[32] Steven Chermak, *Victims in the News: Crime and the American News Media* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

[33] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (Somerset: Transaction Publishers, 1994).

circumstances."[34] Collective traumas of violence that gained national attention in recent decades include the 1969 Manson murders, the 1978 Jonestown mass suicides, and the FBI's siege of the Branch Davidian cult in 1993.[35] Leavy and Maloney argue that the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 was also constructed by media as a national trauma.[36] (Their study was conducted prior to both the shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007 and the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida in 2018.)

Framing theory suggests that how journalists present a topic to people greatly influences how they process information and form meaning from the message. In this view, media not only tell an audience what to think about, as in agenda-setting theory, but also how to think about an issue. Hence, some scholars even deem framing as an extension of agenda-setting and call it "second-level agenda setting." A frame is drawn around a topic, and within this frame are the ways in which media organize and present the events and topics that are covered.[37] It is what media choose to include in coverage, what they choose to leave out, what is emphasized within coverage, and the tone in which the message is delivered. The frames used in news stories provide the context that shapes the later understanding of the issue at hand. Media frames impact discussion by setting the vocabulary and metaphors through which people comprehend an issue.

A media source's location influences how it frames a tragedy like mass murder. Hawdon, Ryan, and Agnich, when studying coverage of the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech, found that newspapers that were more physically close and socially connected to the tragedy published more tragedy-related articles than did distant papers, were more likely to publish victim-focused articles, to

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[34] Arthur Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (New York: Armonk, 1998), 10.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Leavy and Maloney, 275.
[37] "Framing Theory," *Mass communication theory: From theory to practical application,* accessed April 2, 2019, https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/framing-theory/.

depict the community as grieving and collectively victimized, and to report on community solidarity. These methods emit a tragic frame that highlights individual actors in a tragedy instead of the larger social problems that possibly contributed to the event. These frames ultimately relieve social guilt associated with a mass shooting and can help bring closure and foster social solidarity, helping communities to cope. In comparison, they found that distant newspapers overall published fewer tragedy-related articles and were more likely to publish articles about the potential causes of a mass shooting. In modern America, such coverage highlights gun control, school security, and how the mental health profession failed to notice any warning signs in the offender.[38]

The tactics of the more distant newspapers steer toward a shooter frame, which is the opposite of the victim or tragic frame. While focusing on victims can foster an environment of solidarity, a shooter frame, in which media focus on the offender, can elevate social guilt. Shooter frames focus on the shooter's motives, which inadvertently provides the shooter with a voice and can result in the silencing of victims. These frames help the shooter find his place in history, often granting him the fame and recognition he desired, which can lead to communal blaming. If the perpetrator was bullied, suffered clear mental health issues that were not given adequate attention, or somehow cried out for help prior to the offense and this was ignored, the heinousness and tragedy of the crime is neutralized. Guilt is then partially transferred to the collective community. A shooter frame, especially when coupled with the lack of any kind of tragic frame, can even lead to outward efforts to suppress community solidarity and healing.[39] The community of Bath and its reaction to the bombings provide a window into these phenomena historically.

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[38] James Hawdon, John Ryan, and Laura Agnich, "Media framing of a tragedy: A content analysis of print media coverage of the Virginia Tech tragedy," *Traumatology* 20, no. 3 (2014): 199-208.

[39] Ibid.

Location can impact coverage in other ways as well. Herbert Gans noted that the broader news value offered by a tragedy that occurs in a small town is a symbolic, inspiring one – one in which the resilience of good people facing grief can stand for the resilience of the American character itself.[40] Carolyn Kitch said that farming communities have long represented both core national values and an exception to the bustle of modern life, functioning culturally as imaginary spaces, but, because they are real, serving as especially effective symbols in journalism.[41] In this way, a group of people in a community affected by a tragedy can become a sign of innocence lost in our modern world, a world needing to learn from the example of noble, humble, small-town people.

The location of the media source relative to a tragedy influences how the story is told, what themes are emphasized, and what influences media have on the communities that they serve. The needs of an audience that is closest to a tragedy differ from its more distant observers. Media then assist in meaning-making most appropriate to the audiences they serve.[42] In examining nearby, regional, and national era coverage of the Bath disaster, this study explores potential effects of location upon media coverage in 1927.

Trauma

While trauma is typically taken to mean a blow to the tissues of the physical body or the structures of the mind, sociologist Kai Erikson states that after a disaster, the tissue of a community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues within the body and the brain. Erikson says of individual trauma, "Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind

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[40] Herbert Gans, *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004).
[41] Carolyn Kitch and Janice Hume, "Who speaks for the dead? Authority and authenticity in news coverage of the Amish school shootings," in *Journalism in a Culture of Grief* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 41-57.

[42] Hawdon, Ryan, and Agnich, "Media framing of a tragedy: A content analysis of print media coverage of the Virginia Tech tragedy," 200.

has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, possesses you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape, and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty."[43] Even when the community does not fracture in this exact manner, Erikson notes, "Traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos – a group culture, almost – that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up."[44]

Trauma is not only individual when a tragedy such as that at Bath occurs; it is also social. When trauma takes this communal form, it can damage the tissue that holds human groups intact. This tissue is the material that creates social climate, communal moods, and ultimately forms the group's general spirit.[45] Arthur Neal states that community trauma grows "out of an injury, a wound or an assault on social life as it is known and understood."[46] Something "terrible, deplorable, or abnormal" occurs, and social life loses its predictability.[47] It induces confusion, deep suffering, and perceptions of evil existing within human relationships. Neal writes of collective trauma:

> The borders and boundaries between order and chaos, between the sacred and the profane, between good and evil, between life and death, become fragile. People both individually and collectively see themselves as moving into unchartered territory. The central hopes and aspirations of personal lives are temporarily put on hold, and replaced by the darkest of fears and anxieties. Symbolically, ordinary time has stopped: the sun does not shine, the birds do not sing, and the flowers do not bloom.[48]

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[43] Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community* (New York: Norton, 1994), 228.
[44] Ibid., 230-231.
[45] Ibid., 237.
[46] Arthur Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (New York: Armonk, 1998), 4.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Neal, 5.

Collective Memory

Additionally, this study views news as Jack Lule did in his work on the mythological role of the press, as telling the grand stories of humankind for humankind. News functioning as myth becomes "sacred, archetypal stories" that play crucial social roles by offering exemplary models for human life. News stories become an important way society expresses its overall values, beliefs, ideals, and ideologies.[49] A rescuer becomes a symbol of strength and fortitude. A victim is sanctified and exalted as a sacrificial hero. A disaster represents the wrath of God or the power of nature. Stories become models in this way, providing examples of good and evil, right and wrong, strength and weakness. Both myth and news draw upon archetypal figures to offer models that represent shared values and beliefs within a society.[50]

Collective memory is made up of shared beliefs about the past that inform a social group, society, community, region, or nation's present and future. The idea of a communal or collective memory began among European sociologists in the 1920s. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs refined the theoretical construct of "collective memory" in 1925, asking an important question: "How can currents of collective thought whose impetus lies in the past be re-created when we can grasp only the present?"[51] He believed that the present generation, which has no direct memory of an event in the distant past, can accomplish this re-creation through participation in commemorative gatherings with others. The past can then be imaginatively reenacted, a past that otherwise would

[49] Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 15.
[50] Ibid., 15, 43.
[51] As quoted in: Janice Hume, "Memory matters: The evolution of scholarship in collective memory and mass communication," *The Review of Communication* 10, no. 3 (July 2010): 181.

slowly degrade with the passage of time.[52] Collective memory, then, is concerned just as much with current needs as it is with the events and people of the past.[53]

The relationship between history and memory is fraught with complexity. French historian Pierre Nora even deems the two contradictory, stating that while history is certainly about the past, "Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present…. Memory, being a phenomenon of motion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it."[54] He regards collective memory as mystical, organic, and continuous, leaving historians who are suspicious of the whims of memory to try to accurately represent the past using only a few surviving artifacts. The end result, Nora argues, is that historians present a past that appears disconnected from living memory.[55]

The notion of collective memory also reflects a complex relationship between the individual and society. Halbwachs notes that it functions on two levels – at the level of the individual and the level of the collective. Collective memory exists within the individual as a personal memory functioning within a certain social framework. As the person's experiences change, so can viewpoint; thus, collective memory within an individual is malleable. At the collective level, it lives as public representations, social practices, commemoration ceremonies, and rituals of remembrance.[56]

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[52] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and author of introduction Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 24.
[53] Hume, "Memory matters: The evolution of scholarship in collective memory and mass communication," 182.
[54] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. A. Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "'You must remember this': Autobiography as Social Critique," *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 441.

[55] Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, 8-9.

[56] Rauf Garagozov, *Collective Memory: How Collective Representations about the Past are Created, Preserved, and Reproduced* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2015), 2.

Other memory scholars have viewed the seeming contradiction between memory and history more positively. Sociologist Barry Schwartz notes that, "The presence of inherited memories in the midst of invented memories is not an anomaly requiring reconciliation. Because the present is constituted by the past, the past's retention as well as its reconstruction must be anchored in the present."[57] As each new generation alters the beliefs presented by the previous generations, what remains is an assemblage of old beliefs coexisting with the new. "We find the past to be neither totally precarious nor immutable, but a stable image upon which new elements are intermittingly superimposed," Schwartz states.[58]

Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall adds, "We are what we remember, and as memories are reconfigured, identities are redefined. Indeed, we are never outside of memory, for we cannot experience the present except in light of the past, and remembering, in turn, is an action in the present."[59] These ongoing mental reconstructions can help us evolve our identities in such a way that we are better able to navigate, legitimate, or even resist the present order of things. Thus, she notes that even when history and memory seemingly clash, they are still intertwined and can be beneficial.[60]

Through all of the complexities of memory and society, collective memory can become distorted, though Michael Schudson warns that the notion of distortion assumes that there is a standard by which we would be able to measure what an accurate memory must be. This proves difficult with even a personal memory; add in the intricacies of collective memory, a case in which the event remembered is truly a different experience for each participant, and it proves even more

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[57] Barry Schwartz, "Social change and collective memory: The democratization of George Washington," *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991), 234.
[58] Ibid., 234.
[59] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "'You must remember this': Autobiography as Social Critique," *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 440.
[60] Ibid., 441.

so.[61] Because memory is inextricable from social processes, the notion of distortion is problematic. Distortion is inevitable because memory itself is selective. "A way of seeing is a way of not seeing, a way of remembering is a way of forgetting too," Schudson states.[62]

Even so, Schudson establishes categories for the ways in which collective memory can become distorted. The first is distanciation. The past recedes and is reshaped with the passage of time, losing detail and intensity in the process. With living memory faded, institutionalized memories remain. Instrumentalization occurs when memory selects and distorts in order to serve present interests, and conventionalization references a past that is created, rather than experienced – a past promoted and preserved by powerful social institutions. Finally, narrativization refers to passing on a version of the past. The past is encapsulated into a narrative, a story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. This process not only reports the past, but simplifies it and makes it interesting. Situating the past within a narrative has a second function as well; in addition to telling a story about the past, it also tells a story about the past's relation to the present.[63] The narrative is one way to distill memory and history into society.

A major conveyor of narrativization, through nonfiction storytelling, is journalism. The press constructs a narrative about an event in order to report, explain, and contextualize what is happening. At any moment, journalism is a product of its time and place, and it offers a window into the culture of the era. As Schudson has said,

> Few things are more characteristic and revealing of modern culture than the invention and changes in the ways it declares itself anew each day in its presentation of news. We grow up not only human but American, situated in a particular historical moment, and the ways we humanize speak to and speak of our time, our place, 1690 or 1790, 1890 or 1990. Nowhere is

[61] Michael Schudson, *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies, Reconstruct the Past*, D.L. Schacter, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 346.
[62] Ibid., 348.
[63] Ibid., 348-357.

> that speaking more evidently a preparation of the minds of the people than in the newspaper.[64]

If journalists assist in meaning-making most appropriate to the audiences they serve, news coverage of the Bath disaster and its aftermath can help us to better understand its memory.

Research Questions

This dissertation asks: (1) In 1927, how was the Bath disaster portrayed by nearby press, regionally, and nationally?, and (2) How is memory of the disaster reflected in media and local tradition over time? In considering era coverage, analysis will focus on the extent to which a media source's location relative to Bath affected coverage, what frames or narratives were utilized by journalists then, and the extent to which this coverage launched into other issues of the day. It will also consider the volume of coverage received by each subset of newspapers.

Within collective memory analysis, possible factors affecting collective memory are discussed. These include survivor silence, lasting psychological effects, and the causes and effects of the disaster being publicly discussed in modern press. Within local tradition, memory of the Bath disaster lives on within James Couzens Memorial Park, the Bath School Museum, books and plays, in anniversary commemorations, and in honoring the gravesites of those passed.

Methodology

In examining era coverage of the Bath disaster, primary sources include nearby newspapers (*Lansing State Journal*, *Lansing Capital News*, *Ingham County News*, and the *Clinton County Republican News*), regional newspapers (*The Toledo Blade*, *The Youngstown Telegram*, *The*

[64] Michael Schudson, "Preparing the minds of the American people: Three hundred years of the American newspaper," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 100, no. 2 (1991), 442-443.

Youngstown Vindicator, *Erie Daily Times*, *Detroit Free Press*, *The Claire Sentinel*, *The Saline Observer*, and three Chicago publications), and major metropolitan newspapers (*The New York Times*, the *New York Evening Post*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Atlanta Constitution*). As Bath had no newspaper of its own, nearby papers are defined as those within 20 miles of Bath Township. Regional newspapers are those that are between 100-350 miles of Bath. Articles encompass the dates of May 18, 1927 to June 18, 1927, and the newspaper sample consists of 251 articles.

As the majority of these newspapers are not digitized, I spent much time scanning microfilm in search of articles. These searches were conducted at the University of Georgia main library (holds microfilm of *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, and *The New York Times*; other newspaper microfilm viewed here was on loan from other academic institutions), The Library of Michigan in Lansing (holds microfilm of both the *Lansing State Journal* and *Lansing Capital News*), and the Clinton County Historical Society in St. Johns, Michigan (for the *Clinton County Republican News* microfilm.) *The New York Evening Post* is available in full text online. I placed the key words "Bath," "Michigan," and "Kehoe" into databases such as Historical Newspapers Online, Readers Guide Retrospective, Periodicals Index Online, JSTOR, Archives Grid, World Cat, and History and Life with Full Text. I searched the Peabody and Vanderbilt archives using the same keywords. In addition, I searched for coverage in popular magazines of the era, publications such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *National Republic*, *The Outlook*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Collier's*. Court records were searched for legal documents pertaining to the disaster.

Both archival material and media content address collective memory of the Bath disaster. In order to explore memory of the disaster in local tradition, I visited Bath and the surrounding area on two occasions – in September of 2016 and May of 2017. In 2016, I visited the Bath School Museum, which is housed in Bath Middle School. It possesses artifacts from the disaster, including

the American flag that flew over the school on that day and the "Girl with a Cat" bronze memorial statue that was presented to the school board by artist Carlton W. Angell in 1928. This museum also displays some original media coverage. Across from Bath Middle School, on the spot of the former Bath Consolidated School, lies a small memorial park dedicated to Bath's victims. The original cupola that stood atop the school on the day of the disaster is preserved there, and it is also the home of a State of Michigan Historical Marker commemorating the events of May 18, 1927. I also visited the Dewitt District Public Library to view photographs.

In May of 2017, I returned to Bath to further my research and to attend the ninetieth commemoration event of the disaster. Organized by the Bath School Museum Committee, the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, and the *Lansing State Journal*, more than 400 people were in attendance. The event included guided tours of the museum, an extensive program within the James Couzens Memorial Auditorium, and an homage to those who perished within the memorial park. In my visits to Bath, I became acquainted with second-generation survivors; their input also informed my research in regard to memory within local tradition.

In researching memory of the Bath disaster in media over time, I conducted a multi-layered search beginning with anniversary coverage. One has to dig deeply to find modern mention of the disaster, since it is scarcely covered. I searched databases for all years from 1928 to 2019, with particular attention to the tenth, twenty-fifth, fiftieth, and seventy-fifth anniversaries within both newspaper and magazine indexes. In addition to anniversaries, the other impetus for bringing forth Bath memorial coverage is current mass murders, especially those occurring in schools. At times, the Bath disaster is mentioned on the anniversaries of these modern killings. For this reason, I searched for memorial coverage at both the dates that these modern shootings occurred, as well as their anniversaries.

Historians seeking to understand a certain place and time period experience challenges. Carl Becker's concept of historical relativism states that since no historian can capture all of the past, he or she will always be limited to presenting history in fragments.[65] The historical record that remains, while immense overall, is still very much incomplete. Out of all events that happen in an era, only some are remembered, fewer still are recorded, and even a smaller subset of these survive over the years to be studied at a later time. What the historian is then left with is a biased, non-random sample of historical record, as each person who contributed an article or an artifact inevitably has his or her own biases.

In order to optimally counteract this bias, I considered sources carefully, taking into account all types of newspapers to cover the Bath disaster (nearby, regional, and national), and also countering newspaper sources with other artifacts. Examples include letters and photographs found within the Bath School Museum and previously recorded personal interviews with nurses who served the injured. I also spent time within the Bath Township community and listened to second-generation survivors to gain the perspective of both the common citizen and the press. However, the fact that many survivors remained silent for so long and that many passed away long before researchers such as Matt Martyn and Arnie Bernstein broke that barrier of silence, means that some historical detail was indeed lost with these survivors' deaths. Martyn and Bernstein came to Bath in 2004 and 2006 respectively to interview survivors with the aim of telling the story of the disaster, Martyn via a documentary film and Bernstein via narrative non-fiction. No researcher to date has focused on media coverage or collective memory of the Bath disaster.

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[65] Carl Becker, "Everyman his own historian," in Stephen Vaughn ed., *The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 20-36.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter One: Literature Review and Methodology

This introductory chapter has introduced the Bath disaster of 1927, discussed mass killings in America and media's coverage of the phenomenon, and explored the complexities of collective memory. To further explore how early media covered mass murders and what factors play into collective amnesia of the Bath disaster of 1927, this dissertation will uncover themes within both era coverage and memory of the tragedy.

Chapter Two: Disaster in Bath

A detailed account of the horrific events of May 18, 1927, is necessary if one is to fully comprehend both the coverage of the disaster and the deep trauma incurred by those who experienced it. For this reason, and because most Americans have never even heard of the Bath disaster, this chapter serves to fully inform the reader of the events of this tragic day. The account presented in this chapter is based on primary and secondary sources – both era press accounts and scholarly work.

Chapter 3: Heroes, Miracles, and a Madman

This chapter seeks to determine how the Bath disaster was portrayed by nearby press, regionally, and nationally. Three main themes emerged within era coverage of the disaster: tales of heroism, the presence of miracles, and the presentation of Andrew Kehoe as a crazed maniac.

Chapter Four: The Aftermath: Resilience, Recovery, and Voyeurism

Chapter Four discusses what effect distance from Bath had on coverage of the disaster. The newspapers closest to Bath reacted differently than those more distant, both in how much press the Bath disaster obtained, and also in the manner in which the story was covered. A media source's

location influenced how it framed events surrounding the tragedy. Frames are explored through various media's presentation of three phenomena: the thousands of people who flocked to Bath after the disaster, the victims, and the community's efforts in fundraising and relief work. The potential for diversion into other hot-button issues of the day is also discussed.

Chapter Five: A Forgotten Day

The Bath disaster of 1927 has been almost completely obscured by time on a collective level, with many even in Michigan reporting to have never heard of it. Chapter Five considers how the bombings at Bath Consolidated School have been remembered and memorialized in media coverage over time. The themes of survivor silence, lasting psychological effects, and the disaster emerging in press at times of modern school murders are used to explore collective memory aspects of the bombings.

Chapter Six: Memory with Local Tradition

Though the Bath disaster was largely forgotten nationally with no public memorialization, this is not the case within Bath itself. Chapter Six discusses the disaster's presence within local memory. Memory can be seen in the creation of James Couzens Memorial Park, within the Bath School Museum, in books and plays, at anniversary commemorations, and in the special attention given to the graves of children that, decades later, still remained unmarked.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The concluding chapter evaluates possible reasons for the collective forgetting of the Bath disaster of 1927. It also explores historical trends of school murders in America and media's coverage of this violence. This chapter concludes with opportunities for future research and a brief epilogue.

CHAPTER 2:

DISASTER IN BATH

The tragedy of May 18, 1927, took place at arguably the most modern feature of Bath, Michigan, the Bath Consolidated School, which opened its doors in 1922. The school ushered in all of the region's students in grades kindergarten through 12 under one academic roof.[66] To get them to one centralized location, it ran six motor-driven buses and one with a pot-bellied stove driven by a team of horses.[67] Superintendent Emory Huyck transformed the area school system from an antiquated one to one of modern equipment and enlarged curriculum, rivaling that of much larger cities. Its enrollment in 1927 was 285 students.[68] During school days, this many students almost doubled the township population, and added life to the stores and streets in the afternoons.[69]

The new and vastly improved consolidated school was the pride and showplace of the township.[70] More than just a large building, it symbolized Bath citizens' desire to give their children "a greater chance in the world than they themselves had known when readin', 'ritin and 'rithmetic were taught from tattered books in log shacks."[71] *The Lansing State Journal* called it a "monument to the progressive vision of the little community."[72] But, the path to its creation was not filled with

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[66] "School Head's Labor Wrecked," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[67] Dawn Voorheis Hawks, *A Time & Times: My Memoirs* (San Bernardino: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, 2016), 106.
[68] "School Head's Labor Wrecked," 2.
[69] Ralph Goll, "The Great Bath Dynamite Massacre," *True Detective Mysteries*, September 1931, 38-39.
[70] "Bath School was Pride of Community," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[71] Goll, 39.
[72] "Local Pastor sees Human Depravity Alone Responsible for Bath Horror," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 1.

unanimous support. Initially, when the issue of funding and constructing a consolidated school in Bath was placed before voters, it failed. A second time, in 1921, it passed by only 68 votes. There was some financial advantage to the new consolidated system; communities that approved the bond issue and built larger consolidated schools were eligible for state aid for maintenance, salaries, and school buses. By the mid-1920s, the consolidated school movement had spread across much of rural Michigan. The new school curriculum was superior in that it included multiple academic disciplines.[73] Bath Consolidated School was at the forefront of this progress.

A Peculiar Neighbor

While the new school was indeed significantly superior to the small and simple one-room schoolhouses that preceded it, it was also more expensive. Property taxes rose annually in Bath in order to cover the cost of the school. Many people around town grumbled about higher taxes, but no one was quite as agitated by this issue as local farmer and township clerk Andrew Philip Kehoe.[74] Kehoe's farm had a modern three-story home with substantial barns and multiple other buildings, making his taxes higher than other properties.[75] Kehoe was viewed as an eccentric and atypical neighbor – knowledgeable and meticulous in dress and cleanliness, even while farming his land. His typical farming attire was a spotless dress suit, a vest, and appropriately shined shoes.[76] If he happened to get greasy or dirty, he would immediately go to the house, clean up, and then return to his work. Many remarked his barns were more organized and clean than most farmhouses. He did not farm as others at the time did; he tried to do most work with the tractor. Being a trained electrical

[73] Samuel Damren and Betty Damren, "A new tomorrow: A retrospective of the 1927 Bath School disaster," *Chronicle* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 17.
[74] Justin Peters, "'We still look at ourselves as survivors': More than eighty years later, remembering the deadliest school massacre in American history," *Slate Magazine: Crime: A Blog about Murder, Theft, and other Wickedness*, December 18, 2012, accessed October 12, 2017, http://www.slate.com/blogs/crime/2012/12/18/bath_school_bombing_remembering_the_deadliest_school_massacre_in_american.html.
[75] Wilkins, 8.
[76] Bernstein, 21.

engineer, he was at his best when he was fixing machinery. In fact, he spent so much time with mechanical tinkering that his farm was not always successful in yielding suitable crops.[77]

Figure 1: This is Bath Consolidated School as it appeared from its opening in 1922 until May 17, 1927. Photo courtesy of the Bath School Museum.

Andrew Kehoe and his wife Nellie Price Kehoe bought a 185-acre farm just outside of Bath in 1919 from Nellie's aunt for $12,000, putting 50 percent down and taking out a mortgage for the additional $6,000.[78] The mortgage was issued and managed by Lawrence Price's estate, the estate of Nellie's late father.[79] The Kehoe farm and home was the showcase dwelling of the Bath area. The couple had the luxury of running water, both hot and cold, and a central heating system with forced

[77] M.J. Ellsworth, *The Bath School Disaster* (Self-published, Bath: 1927), 26-27.
[78] Wilkins, 8.
[79] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Joseph H. Dunnebacke. Clinton County, Michigan, 198.

air blown throughout the house.[80] It was finished in oak hardwood on every floor, making for a visually impressive interior.[81] Their farm was a worthy complement to the house, with state-of-the-art machinery well beyond the means of the average Bath farmer.[82]

It was Andrew's and Nellie's first marriage. Andrew was 40 years old when they wed, and Nellie 37. Neither had children from any previous relationship, nor did they have any of their own after marrying. This was somewhat of an oddity for the era and the rural culture in which they lived.[83] The fact that the Kehoes had no children meant that they were not personally benefiting from the modern school for which they were being taxed. Andrew Kehoe often complained to others about the unfairness of this scenario. One Bath resident recalled of Kehoe in 1931, "He often talked about the school, but then he was a school official. Everyone understood he was about to lose his farm, so his bitterness did not seem unusual."[84]

[80] Wilkins, 8.
[81] Harold Burnett, *History of Bath Township 1826-1976* (Self-published, Bath: 1978), 211.

[82] Bernstein, 20.
[83] Grant Parker, "Disaster in Bath," *Michigan History* 65, no. 3 (1981): 12-17.
[84] Goll, 77.

Figure 2: Pictured here is the Kehoes' three-story modern home, as it appeared until its destruction on May 18, 1927. The main barn is also visible in the background. Photo courtesy of the Bath School Museum.

Figure 3: This image is the only known photograph of Andrew Kehoe. He is pictured here with his wife Nellie Price Kehoe. Photo courtesy of the Bath School Museum.

Known as a "dynamite farmer," Kehoe often set off blasts on his land, blowing up nuisance stumps and rocks. This alone was not necessarily cause for alarm, as dynamite was an acceptable method of land management in the 1920s, but Kehoe had also earned a reputation for cruelty. He shot and killed the pet dog of neighbors David and Lulu Harte in 1920 and also beat one of his own horses to death for being what he deemed was too lazy.[85] David Harte said that this was the most brutal treatment of a horse that he had ever seen. Kehoe beat the mare to death because she could not pull a heavy load of fertilizer alone over the sandy hills of his farm.[86] As time passed, Kehoe came to

[85] Bernstein, 23-24.
[86] "Kehoe Knew Few as Friend," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.

be known as a stubborn and severe man with quite a few quirky personality traits – a man prone to resorting to drastic solutions to small problems.[87]

Kehoe's classmates and friends growing up described him as comparatively social during his youth, but as he grew older, becoming increasingly distant and inclined to want his own way.[88] Born in 1872 on a farm near Tecumseh, Michigan, he was one of 11 children. In grade school, he was a good student and well-behaved. He had a passion for mechanical devices even then. T.H. McCurdy, a classmate of Kehoe's at Michigan State University, recalled Kehoe as being quite popular in college. "The Kehoe I remember was not an enemy of society," he said. "He was a fair-haired, full-faced youth with dark eyes and a mouth that always seemed to smile at you." McCurdy also recalled him being quite stubborn with a relentless persistence and a knack for planning and engineering elaborate practical jokes. "When he set his mind on doing a thing, there was no letting up on it. He stuck to it until it was accomplished," he said.[89]

While Kehoe's actions and mannerisms during his time in Bath seemed odd to some and did invoke curiosity, residents reported that they felt it was best not to question him.[90] Kehoe's neighbor, Monty Ellsworth, stated that while Kehoe was extremely friendly, "There was just something about him – you didn't feel right close to him."[91] He marched to the beat of a different drum, marching that could result in a violent tantrum of rage when things did not go his way. Many community members viewed Kehoe as highly intelligent but unable to tolerate opposing viewpoints.[92] As one

[87] Peters, 1.
[88] Ellsworth, 27.
[89] Goll, 78.
[90] Parker, 13.
[91] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck,* May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Monty Ellsworth. Clinton County, Michigan, 133.

[92] James W. Hixson, "A May Day to Remember," *Michigan History* 83, no. 3 (1999): 36.

acquaintance put it, he was "a difficult man, difficult to understand and difficult to make understand."[93]

At the same time, however, he was known to go out of his way to help others, to host radio-listening gatherings at his home, and to present gifts, even large ones, to those he deemed friends.[94] During one social gathering at his home, he presented each man a copper puzzle which he had made himself. Each was unique and exhibited master craftsmanship.[95] Kehoe helped Ellsworth install a steam boiler in his slaughterhouse in 1925, even taking the time to explain the inner workings of it to him. When the boiler needed repairs, Kehoe would also get the needed parts and repair it, never asking for any compensation.[96] While Kehoe was certainly obstinate and unpredictable, there were many examples of Andrew Kehoe being charming and accommodating.[97]

Many newspapers at the time mentioned a simple and sole reason for Kehoe blowing up the school – that he blamed it for his mounting financial difficulties, as property taxes had risen exponentially due to consolidated school costs. It is true that this angered Kehoe; he used his position on the school board to vehemently oppose the increases and to also challenge Superintendent Huyck in any financial matter involving the school. But, it is likely that his motivations were not that simple or distinct. By 1926, Kehoe had many matters that were not going his way, including losing his re-election bid for township clerk. The Bath School bombing was perhaps his final attempt at exerting some level of control. Bath Township supervisor S.E. Ewing told a journalist that Kehoe blew up the school because he felt it was the only way that he could control it. "He wanted to rule or ruin," Ewing said.[98]

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[93] Wilkins, 22.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ellsworth, 35.
[96] Ellsworth, 26-27.
[97] Hixson, 36.
[98] Goll, 77.

There were signs that Kehoe may have begun his disastrous planning in 1926. That summer, he began ongoing electrical wiring work for Bath Consolidated School, and any time there was any type of mechanical trouble within the school, the board members called on Kehoe to resolve it.[99] This gave him nearly unrestricted access to the school's interior and meant he was spending a significant amount of time in the basement, the location which would eventually house his planted explosives. It is possible that this is when he began to envision the exact placement of the dynamite, wiring, and timing devices. According to testimony at the jury inquest, his across-the-street neighbors, David and Lulu Harte, noticed that Kehoe did not harvest any crops that year, only hay.[100] They offered to help Kehoe harvest his bean and potato crops, and he refused. The produce rotted in the fields.[101] He sold all of his hogs and cattle.[102] He also canceled insurance on his home and farm buildings.[103]

At the close of the year, Kehoe held a dress rehearsal of sorts for his plans. Under the guise of a new year's eve celebration, he wired an alarm clock to trigger dynamite on his land to explode at midnight on December 31, 1926.[104] When later talking with J.P. Sleight about his new year's eve blast, he said, "I guess I jarred them up," and then smiled "in the kind of cheerful way he always did."[105]

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[99] "Jury Hearing is Recount of Whole Story," *Lansing Capital News*, May 23, 1927, 1.
[100] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of David Harte. Clinton County, Michigan, 179.

[101] Goll, 40.
[102] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Monty Ellsworth. Clinton County, Michigan, 133.

[103] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Joseph H. Dunnebacke. Clinton County, Michigan, 198.
[104] "Kehoe called Rifle Expert," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 24, 1927, 1.
[105] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Job Sleight. Clinton County, Michigan, 55.

Matters at home were also spiraling out of control by the summer of 1926. Nellie Kehoe became ill with intense headaches and severe coughing. She grew pale and lost weight. She entered a cycle of going in and out of Saint Lawrence Hospital (a facility named after her uncle, Lawrence Price) through the fall of 1926 and into the winter of 1927. Doctors first deemed her condition tuberculosis, then suggested it was asthma. Nellie became even more of a recluse than she was prior, rarely venturing out of the house.[106] Hospital bills accumulated. In addition, the mortgage on the farm that the Kehoes had taken out in 1919 had not been paid in years; for reasons unclear, he paid it through 1921 but none after that.[107] Kehoe tried to have the valuation of the farm lowered, and also asked that the mortgage be forgiven, saying that he had initially paid too much for the farm. In these efforts he was unsuccessful.[108]

Nellie Kehoe re-entered Saint Lawrence Hospital in April of 1927. Her return to the hospital, coupled with increasing marginalization from a community that had once respected him, seemed to signal the end of any restraint Kehoe had left. Mental planning evolved to swift action. In order to be successful at the wiring of the school, complete cover was necessary. His daytime activities remained the same, including visiting his wife at the hospital. The dynamite installation was done by night. He had plenty of explosives, much of which he had purchased under the guise of using it for tree stump blasting. He had accumulated more than one ton. Most was bulk pyrotol, a World War I explosive which, when combined with dynamite, created a powerful blast. He also possessed large quantities of stick dynamite.[109]

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[106] Bernstein, 37; Laurie Hollinger, "Early Lansing Hospitals," *The Lansing State Journal*, October 5, 2014. Lawrence Price donated $100,000 in 1923 in order for Lansing to have a modern medical facility. This is equivalent to more than 1.5 million dollars today.

[107] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Joseph H. Dunnebacke. Clinton County, Michigan, 198.

[108] Ellsworth, 40.

[109] Parker, 13-14; "Heavy orders cut supply of pyrotol," *Granite Falls Record*, September 30, 1927. Sales and distribution of pyrotol to farmers ceased in 1928 due to supplies running out.

Because the planting of this many explosives could not be completed in one night, exact planning was paramount. School janitor Frank Smith noticed six weeks prior to the tragedy that a lock had been sprung at the back of the school; Kehoe's planting of the explosives might have begun at least that far back.[110] Kehoe drove his truck to the school in the darkness and parked it where it was less likely to be seen. A long, main supporting timber ran the length of the basement in the newer section of the school. Kehoe attached the main wire to the timber itself, stapling it every three feet. From this main wire, electrical tributaries linked to twelve or more ignition sites which were placed behind supportive pillars.[111]

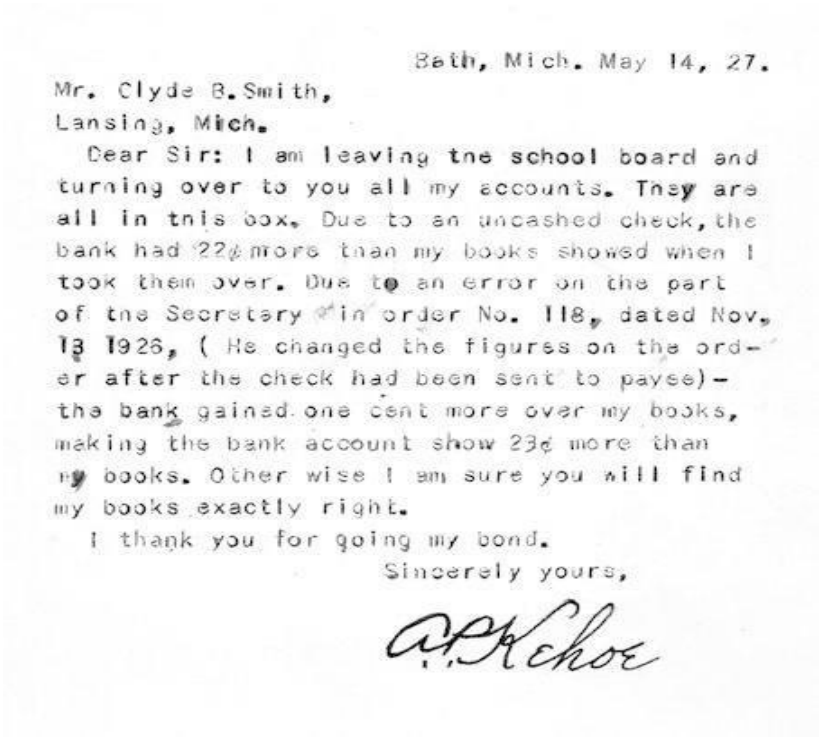
A Day of Disaster

The morning of May 18, 1927, began with rain and lightning in the early dark hours. It was the kind of healthy spring shower that farmers look forward to, one that bathes the land and nourishes crops.[112] At sunrise, sun overtook rain. The end of the school year was drawing near. The school buses brought the children to school at the usual time, but not all were present, as some seniors were done with their final exams, and others had exams that began later in the morning. Martha Hintz, who was in the ninth grade in 1927, recalled, "The day could not have been more beautiful with its spring freshness and a glorious sunshine which at once encouraged us to master our work … Peals of childish laughter rang out as the little children ran outdoors with their playmates to romp and roam on and about the school yard before the bell of order rang."[113]

Around 7 a.m., Kehoe visited the train depot in order to express-mail a package to Clyde B. Smith of Lansing. Smith was the insurance agent who handled the school's surety bond. Kehoe

[110] "Begin Sift of Bath Disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[111] Parker, 13.
[112] Bernstein, 55.
[113] Ellsworth, 46.

reported that the box was valued at $25 and weighed 24 pounds.[114] Later on that afternoon, it was feared that Kehoe had mailed explosives to Smith because the box used for the mailing was originally a crate used to house 50 pounds of dynamite. However, the box only contained the school board's financial documents, along with a note from Kehoe stating that he was leaving the school board and turning all records over to Smith. He returned all of the school board's property like stationery, envelopes, and check books.[115] He also seemed very concerned with explaining a 23-cent discrepancy in his accounting.[116] Kehoe's note was typed, dated May 14, 1927:



Bath, Mich. May 14, 27.

Mr. Clyde B. Smith,
Lansing, Mich.

Dear Sir: I am leaving the school board and turning over to you all my accounts. They are all in this box. Due to an uncashed check, the bank had 22¢ more than my books showed when I took them over. Due to an error on the part of the Secretary in order No. 118, dated Nov. 13 1926, (He changed the figures on the order after the check had been sent to payee)- the bank gained one cent more over my books, making the bank account show 23¢ more than my books. Other wise I am sure you will find my books exactly right.

I thank you for going my bond.

Sincerely yours,

A. P. Kehoe

Figure 4: Kehoe's typed letter to Clyde B. Smith. [117]

[114] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of D.B. Huffman. Clinton County, Michigan, 195.

[115] "Records Fill Mystery Box," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[116] "23 Cent Discrepancy in Accounts Worried Kehoe," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.
[117] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Clinton County, Michigan, 3.

One hour later, neighbors saw Kehoe busy around his farm.[118] While they could not tell exactly what he was doing, his nearest neighbors, the Hartes, noticed that he had been much busier lately in general around his land. Since May 8, Kehoe had been working meticulously, stringing twisted pairs of electric wires to each of his farm buildings.[119] The house itself was completely wired, from the home all the way out to 200 feet toward the road. Nearby neighbors who saw his actions assumed he was wiring his house for electricity.[120] David Harte told his wife that he thought Kehoe might even be in the process of inventing something.[121] What they did not know was that the hundreds of feet of fine wire laid by Kehoe led to spark plugs which were inserted into the tops of cans brimming with gasoline. On May16, the Hartes saw him carrying a large load of straw into his tool shed, a building of which there was no legitimate use for straw.[122] Kehoe even girdled the fruit trees on his farm – he cut the bark from them, ensuring that they would perish from lack of nutrients being carried from the roots to the leaves above.[123]

In one last act of cruelty to animals that served him, he hobbled his two horses by binding their feet together with wires, ensuring no escape.[124] Kehoe then threw the switch that initiated the destruction of his farm and all of value within it. All buildings burst into flames simultaneously, except for the chicken coop. The explosive apparatus placed in the hen house failed to detonate – Kehoe's only failed device placed on the farm.[125] The powerful explosion sent debris flying well

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[118] Hixson, 36.
[119] Wilkins, 27.
[120] "Desolated Village Stoical in Sorrow, Cleaning," *Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[121] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of David Harte. Clinton County, Michigan, 179.

[122] Wilkins, 27.
[123] Damren and Damren, 18.
[124] Mayo, 175.
[125] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Sidney Howell. Clinton County, Michigan, 86.

across the road into a neighbor's buildings, setting roofs ablaze. Kehoe then placed his rifle in the passenger seat of his truck and drove away, loaded down with dynamite and various other projectiles, in route to Bath Consolidated School.[126] On the way, he drove by his friend Sidney Howell and a few other men who were standing on the road. He stopped and told them, "Boys, you are my friends. You better get out of here. You better go down to the school."[127] They reported that his face was pale and his expression wild-eyed.[128] He also passed Monty Ellsworth. Ellsworth was walking home to get rope to assist at the school. Kehoe grinned at him, showing all of his teeth.[129]

[126] Hixson, 36.

[127] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Sidney Howell. Clinton County, Michigan, 86.

[128] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Robb Howell. Clinton County, Michigan, 107.

[129] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Monty Ellsworth. Clinton County, Michigan, 133.

Figure 5: While the photographer wrote that the above image features a device Kehoe used in exploding the school, it actually shows the only explosive device used on the Kehoe farm that failed to function. In this photograph, K.F. Anderson and J.V. Polhemus of the Michigan Millers Insurance company hold the apparatus. The two men discovered it in the chicken coop, the only building that still stood on the Kehoe farm. The apparatus consisted of a quart bottle filled with gasoline placed within a section of tin can, creating a fountain similar to that used in watering poultry. At the back of the bottle, an automobile spark coil and spark plug were attached. There was a wick of yarn which led to the fountain area of the explosive, and straw was packed all around it, making for a potent homemade bomb. This photograph was featured in *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, and details mentioned here were gathered from the newspaper's photo caption. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith. Photo credit: R.C. Leavenworth of Lansing, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Complete chaos and horror filled the school's grounds. Kehoe's 98-cent alarm clock had done its job. In an instant, the north wing of the school crumbled.[130] The roof and the second floor collapsed, causing the sixth grade classroom to fall into the third and fourth grade classrooms below. The children and teachers were trapped in a full five feet of debris.[131] The boom of the explosion was heard for miles. A black plume of smoke alerted surrounding communities to the peril. Superintendent Huyck, while carrying wounded fifth grader Carlton Hollister to safety, ran to the telephone office to alert the switchboard operator, 19-year-old Lenora Babcock, to call for help. The

[130] Hixson, 36.
[131] David Kim, et al, 313.

Lansing and East Lansing police departments, as well as the fire departments, were contacted immediately.

Neighbors and witnesses began pulling children out of the rubble. Frantic parents, many of whom lived within walking distance, sprinted to the school.[132] Fern Johns lived only a few blocks away. When she and friend Edna Shoals arrived, they noticed a child hanging from a second floor window. Horrified, they realized that the lifeless body there was Johns' seven-year-old daughter, Doris. She had been blown from her first-floor classroom at an angled trajectory thorough the ceiling of the second floor, landing upside down on a partially blown out window sill.[133] From a distance, she looked like an inverted and discarded doll.[134] There was no immediate way to get her down. Rescuers could not reach her due to the crushed interior stairway. It would be hours before little Doris could be taken home to her mother.[135]

In all of the chaos, shock, and feverish rescue work, no one noticed yet another truck rushing to the scene. Kehoe arrived at the school about 15 minutes after the explosion.[136] Seeing his plan only partially successful, he circled around the block a few times before speeding back.[137] When he stopped his pickup, Kehoe saw Huyck assisting the injured, and he called him over to his truck. Not knowing Kehoe's motives, Huyck hurried over to inform him of the situation. With how frantic he was in trying to organize the rescue of as many children as possible, it is unlikely Huyck knew that

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[132] Hixson, 37; Personal account of Carlton Hollister from May 18, 1997, as printed in: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, *A Time & Times: My Memoirs* (San Bernardino: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, 2016), 116.
[133]Jim Church (relative of Edna Schoals), interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Bath School Disaster 90th Commemoration, Bath, Michigan, May 20, 2017.

[134] Grant Parker, *Mayday: The History of a Village Holocaust* (Lansing: Liberty Press, 1980): 117.
[135] Jim Church (relative of Edna Schoals), interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Bath School Disaster 90th Commemoration, Bath, Michigan, May 20, 2017.
[136] Hixson, 37.
[137] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Jess Curtis. Clinton County, Michigan, 308; Testimony of Dart Long, 312; Testimony of John Sniveley, 316.

Kehoe's farm was burning. When he reached the truck, he asked Kehoe for assistance; his machine would be useful in hauling rope and poles for the rescue.[138] The superintendent's foot was on the running board of the truck, with Kehoe still seated in the driver's seat. The two rivals exchanged some words, and Kehoe reached for his rifle. They struggled with the firearm, but only for a few seconds.[139] Kehoe fired his rifle into the back of the truck cab, solidly hitting a cache of dynamite inside his automobile.[140]

Few American towns have ever passed through such moments of pure horror and terror as Bath did following this second explosion. The injured children who were lying on the lawn jolted up and screamed at the enormous sound of the second blast.[141] Propped up against a tree with his eyes and ears full of plaster, nine-year-old Raymond Eschtruth was recovering from recently being extracted from the rubble. The second explosion scared him so badly that he jumped and sprinted to his aunt's house, not realizing until later that he had done so on a broken foot.[142] So much had happened in such a short amount of time that no person had yet realized the full implications of even the first blast. The initial thought of many was that an exploding boiler in the school basement must have caused the north wing to crumble. With Kehoe's second bomb, however, it was clear that only dynamite or nitroglycerin could have produced such horrific results.[143] Many were frantic with fear

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[138] Bernstein, 84-85.
[139] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Charles Rawson. Clinton County, Michigan, 322.

[140] Bernstein, 84-85. In regard to Kehoe's rifle, Monty Ellsworth reported that Kehoe had a new .30 bolt action rifle that he had recently sent to Detroit in order for it to have a special sight installed. Ellsworth shot rifles with Kehoe two weeks before the disaster, and he noticed a box in the back of Kehoe's truck with about 1,000 rifle shells in it. From: *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Monty Ellsworth. Clinton County, Michigan, 133.
[141] Dennis Pfaff, "Dynamite killed 45 people in Bath, Mich., 60 years ago: School board members deadly revenge on town's children recalled," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1987.
[142] Susan Hagerman (daughter of Raymond Eschtruth), interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Bath School Disaster 90th Commemoration, Bath, Michigan, May 20, 2017.
[143] Goll, 41-42.

that more explosions would soon follow. As Principal Huggett rushed back toward the school at the sound of the second blast, a man stopped him and said, "Don't! It's a set job. They got Mr. Huyck and they will get you too."[144]

The truck explosion caused a new wave of destruction via flying shrapnel and machine debris. All that remained of Kehoe's Ford pickup was the motor, the chassis, and a portion of the steering wheel, which had parts of his intestines lodged into it.[145] Kehoe, Huyck, and local farmer Nelson McFarren, being closest to the truck, were killed instantly.[146] Pieces of their bodies were blown into the trees and power lines. Windows in nearby homes shattered, and flames ripped through automobiles. Huyck was only identifiable by a portion of his coat and his large Masonic ring on one hand. His foot and shoe were found in another location. Kehoe's friend, Sidney Howell, was able to identify Kehoe by his face which remained intact.[147] About an hour later, Leone Smith, Alex Urquhart, and Dr. Milton Shaw found further remains of Kehoe in a ditch near Smith's garden. Within the bundle of blood-covered clothing, they found Kehoe's driver's license and bank book.[148] McFarren's son-in-law, Bath postmaster Glenn Smith, though not killed instantly, was mortally

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[144] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Floyd Huggett. Clinton County, Michigan, 37.
[145] "Frantic Mothers Search Line at Morgue for Own Children," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[146] Bernstein, 84-85.
[147] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Jay Pope. Clinton County, Michigan, 281; Testimony of Homer Jennison, 240; Testimony of Sidney Howell, 86; Testimony of George Harrington, 47.

[148] George Alderton, "Lansing Rescue Workers Discover Body of Kehoe," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 13; *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Leone Smith. Clinton County, Michigan, 232.

wounded.[149] Smith's legs were severed below the knee, and he died soon after arriving at the hospital.[150] It was his 33rd birthday.[151]

Cleo Clayton, an 8-year-old boy, and his teacher, Leona Gutekunst, were standing in the front area of the school. They had escaped through a window in the front, as neither could squeeze through a hole in the back of the classroom through which the other second graders escaped. Both were hit by shrapnel from Kehoe's truck explosion. A piece pierced Gutekunst's leg, causing a bad break.[152] Cleo was hit by a bolt; it tore into his stomach, ripped into his intestines, and lodged into his spine. He was taken to Edward W. Sparrow Hospital in Lansing for treatment, but it was a wound from which he would not recover. He lived for seven hours after his injury, conscious the entire time. The nurses who cared for him said he was in good spirits, however, and eagerly told them the story of the two explosions at his school. One nurse said of Cleo, "No braver little man ever lived." [153]

Serious injuries from the truck blast were not limited to those in close proximity. Anna Perrone was standing almost a block away on a sidewalk; she was holding her baby in one arm and the hand of her other child with her other arm. As Kehoe's truck burst apart, a two-inch burr hit her eye, tearing her eye out and fracturing the orbital bone. Another piece of debris hit the top of her

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[149] Bernstein, 86.
[150] "Maniac's Wife Slain before School Blast," *New York Evening Post*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[151] "Death, Uninvited Guest, Arrives too Soon for Bath Birthday Party," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.
[152] Vina Shepherd Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, July 28, 2005, Ashton, Michigan, part of Sparrow Hospital Oral History Program, audio courtesy of Sparrow Health Sciences Library. Fisk was a second grader in Gutekunst's class on May 18, 1927. She and all of her classmates, except Cleo Clayton, were able to escape out the back of the school through a hole that Principal Floyd Huggett created into Gutekunst's classroom. The second graders climbed through this hole into Ms. Sterling's first grade classroom. They were then able to climb out a window and exit to the back of the school. None of the students in Gutekunst's class were injured, with the exception of Cleo Clayton, who was killed by Kehoe's second bomb.
[153] "Boy, escaping first blast, victim of second: Cleo Clayton dies from injuries received in blast from car," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 2.

head, gouging a deep hole in her skull. Amazingly, her two children remained unharmed. At the hospital, 62 pieces of bone were removed from her skull, and a portion of her brain was extracted.[154]

All of the phones at Sparrow Hospital rang simultaneously around 9 a.m. CST, alerting staff to prepare for the arrival of injured children, and an SOS was put out on the radios across town to alert all off-duty nurses to come and assist.[155] Extra physicians were called in to both area hospitals from the cities of Charlotte, St. Johns, and Mason.[156] Stretchers quickly began arriving via both automobile and ambulance. The children arrived at the hospitals with rubble in their hair and covered in brick particulate, dust, and dirt. Some had clothing embedded in their skin. The children had lacerations, compound fractures, multiple bruises, skull fractures, and were in shock. Some had matted hair from hemorrhage, and others had foreign objects in their wounds and eyes.[157]

As the hospital then had no dedicated pediatric ward and only 75 beds total, the children quickly overwhelmed the space.[158] Orderlies removed mattresses and pillows from hospital storage rooms, laid them out in 2nd floor hallways, and made them up with clean linens for the children.[159] Soon, all empty rooms and corridors were lined with stretchers and Red Cross cots, each with an ID tag, denoting name, age, medications administered, and diagnosis and extent of injury.[160] Nurse Marie Niels Fenner quickly set up a registry of sorts so that frantic parents could be matched with

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[154] Ellsworth, 67. After 29 days in the hospital, she returned home, but she continued to have issues such as severe headaches and dizziness.
[155] Eleanor Clapp Smith and Gloria Smith Bouterse, *Sparrow Tales: Memories from the Graduates, School of Nursing 1899-1961* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1987), 35-38, accounts of nurses Bernice Vowler Smith and Florence Lechlitner Alexander.
[156] Jean Frazier, *A Century of Caring: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital Centennial History 1896-1996* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1996), 87.
[157] Eleanor Clapp Smith and Gloria Smith Bouterse, *Sparrow Tales: Memories from the Graduates, School of Nursing 1899-1961* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1987), 30, account of nurse Helen Miller Perrine.
[158] Ibid., 40, 58.
[159] Jean Frazier, *A Century of Caring: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital Centennial History 1896-1996* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1996), 89.
[160] Eleanor Clapp Smith and Gloria Smith Bouterse, *Sparrow Tales: Memories from the Graduates, School of Nursing 1899-1961* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1987), 30, account of nurse Helen Miller Perrine.

their children.[161] On-and off-duty doctors and nurses rushed to the school as well to assist. Many of these doctors did not charge for their services.[162]

The final death and injury toll from this horrific day was 58 injured, many critically, and 45 killed; among the deaths were 38 children, most of them under twelve years old, two teachers, Superintendent Huyck, McFarren, Smith, and Kehoe himself.[163] Of the 89 children in the third through sixth grades, 35 were killed, and 32 seriously injured – 75 percent either murdered or hurt.[164] The forty-fifth murder victim was discovered the following day: Mrs. Nellie Price Kehoe.

[161] Frazier, 90.
[162] "Report Bath Relief Work," *Clinton County Republican News*, June 2, 1927, 1.
[163] Bernstein, xvi. Beatrice Gibbs clung to life for three months before dying in the hospital. She died August 22, 1927, as a result of complications during a surgery to remove a splinter from her hip.
[164] "Blast Depletes Grades at Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 9.

Figure 6: This aerial image, printed in a 1931 issue of *True Detective Mysteries* magazine, shows how crippling just a portion of Kehoe's dynamite and pyrotol was to the school structure. From: Ralph Goll, "The Great Bath Dynamite Massacre," *True Detective Mysteries*, September 1931, 38-39.

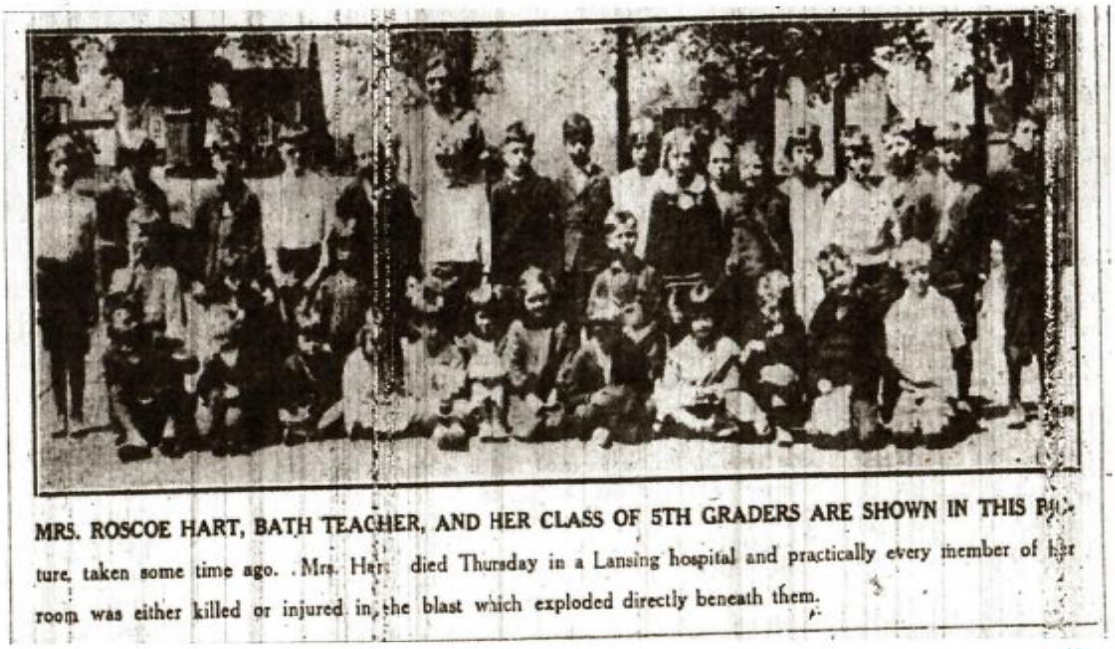

Figure 7: The photograph above shows Mrs. Blanche Hart (married to Roscoe Hart) and her class of fifth graders in 1927. Hart died in the blast and every child in the class was either killed or injured. *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 2.

In the Wake of Tragedy

On the morning of May 19, 1927, investigators began combing through the ruins of Kehoe's farm. Two police officers took a cigarette break near the chicken coop. It was there that they found the charred remains of Mrs. Kehoe.[165] She was draped across a makeshift crate near where the farmhouse had stood.[166] Her remains were so unrecognizable that they had gone unnoticed by hundreds on Wednesday, as many had walked over what remained of the Kehoe farm. Investigators were able to positively identify her by her false teeth.[167]

Although badly burned, there was evidence of injury prior to the fire. Her left arm was completely separated from the shoulder. Her right arm was bent backward, the bones in this arm

[165] Bernstein, 122.
[166] Wilkins, 26.
[167] "Find Remains of Mrs. Kehoe," *The Clinton County Republican News*, May 19, 1927, 1.

fractured. Most notably, her skull was severely cracked at the forehead, an injury that could have been caused by blunt force trauma. Because the body was so charred, determining with certainty exactly how Mrs. Kehoe sustained these injuries, whether by violence or fire, was not possible. It was, however, assumed by many familiar with the case, including the authorities as well as friends and neighbors, that Kehoe bludgeoned his wife to death, likely one or two days prior to the morning of May 18. He then hauled her body in the hog crate to burn, along with the rest of anything of value, on his farm.[168]

Figure 8: This photograph shows tourists milling about the Kehoe farm on May 19, 1927; this image was sold as a postcard in Bath and Lansing stores following the disaster. The cart pictured is where Nellie Kehoe's remains were found. Photo credit: L. Waldron of Grand Ledge, Michigan, May 19, 1927.

Personal items and valuables were, seemingly ceremonially, placed with Mrs. Kehoe – family silverware next to her head and upon her chest, and a small metal box was beside her body.

[168] Bernstein, 122-124.

This compact box held treasures such as various jewelry pieces and a set of teaspoons engraved with a "K" monogram. There were also singed papers – their marriage license, bills from hospitals in Lansing and Detroit, and a rather large roll of what was either money or uncashed Liberty Bonds. The currency was burned so badly that it was hard to tell. The fire left few answers.[169] While Kehoe left no note, in keeping with his argumentative personality, he did have a last word of sorts. At the edge of the farm attached to a wire fence, safe from the blaze, investigators found a plain wooden sign upon which Kehoe had carefully stenciled his final message of blame to the community he loathed: "CRIMINALS ARE MADE, NOT BORN."[170]

[169] Ibid.

Figure 9: This photograph shows the curious walking though the destroyed Kehoe farm; this image was sold as a postcard in Bath and Lansing stores following the disaster and highlights that "the maniac had plenty of farm implements." In the background looms the only structure left of Kehoe's once grand home – the chimney. Photo credit: L. Waldron of Grand Ledge, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

[170] Bernstein, 112.

Figure 10: This photograph shows that only the foundation and the chimney remained of Kehoe's modern three-story home. Photo Credit: Van Horn Studios of Owosso, Michigan, May 26, 1927.

Through all of the harrowing events of May 18, as investigators and rescuers combed through the school, they came to realize that it could have been worse – much worse. Due to a flaw in Kehoe's wiring, the south wing of the school was spared. Searchers discovered an additional 504 pounds of explosives that did not ignite in the school's explosion. Included within this was stick dynamite, pyrotol, and 250 pounds of gun powder, all connected by many yards of heavy wiring linking to hot shot batteries and alarm clock timing devices.[171] It appeared that Kehoe had intended to take the life of every child and teacher in Bath. Bomb experts at the time determined that if all of the explosives had ignited the way Kehoe intended, it is highly likely that every person in the building would have perished, and anyone within several hundred feet of the building would also have been killed instantly.[172] There were 236 children and adults in the school at the time of the

[171] Wilkins, 57.
[172] Wilkins, 21-27.

explosion.[173] Just about every family in Bath, except for the Kehoes, had at least one child at Bath Consolidated School; some families had as many as four children there.[174] A short circuit in the wires leading from the time clock to the gun powder and dynamite saved a multitude of people.

Figure 11: This photograph shows state police, county officials, and other rescuers standing with approximately nine bushels of unexploded dynamite which was removed from the school. This image was published in the May 19, 1927, edition of *The Lansing State Journal*. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith. Photo credit: R.C. Leavenworth of Lansing, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Friday, May 20, 1927, was a beautiful and sunny spring day; it was a day that was supposed to celebrate the youth of Bath – the day of graduation for seniors. Instead, a multitude of funerals took place; death certificates supplanted beribboned diplomas. *The Lansing State Journal* reported

[173] David Kim, et al., 311.

[174] Bernstein, 74.

that the "rays of the rising sun will never penetrate the crushed spirits of the community."[175] Burying that many people in one weekend was no easy task. Seventeen pastors were required in order to complete all of the services by the end of Sunday.[176] Some families who would have preferred to bury their loved ones on Friday were forced to wait until Saturday due to the shortage of undertaking facilities.[177] The *Detroit Free Press* referred to Bath that weekend as "swollen-eyed with soul-gripping pain."[178]

The disaster attracted throngs of the public to Bath; they traveled from other areas of Michigan but also from neighboring states. The small township was inundated with people and automobiles, a great number that Bath had never seen and was likely to never see again. More than 80,000 cars, most with multiple passengers, inched their way slowly down the small dirt road that led to Bath.[179] *The Lansing State Journal* said of Sunday's surge of automobiles, "Traffic lines carried 85,000 past the country's greatest monument of horror during the daylight hours of Bath's saddest Sabbath."[180]

The throngs were made up of some with legitimate business – journalists and friends and relatives of afflicted families – however, the majority of the massive crowd was the curious, the morbidly fascinated. Newspapers at the time called them "thrill hunters" and "sensation-seekers."[181] *The Toledo Blade* said that Bath was a "mecca of the curious" during the weekend of the funerals, with the crowds coming in from early morning all the way through midnight.[182] Privacy was hard to

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[175] "Friday to be Commencement Day for Eternity – Not Life," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[176] "17 Pastors Required for Bath Funerals," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 3.
[177] "Remaining Blast Victims Buried," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 22, 1927, 18.
[178] "Bath Buries 17 Victims of Mad Murderer," *Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 1927, 1.
[179] Cain, 34.
[180] "Valley of Tears made Mecca of Curious during Funerals," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 1.
[181] "Bath: Morbid Crowds There," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1; "Bath Buries its Last Dead," *Detroit Free Press*, May 23, 1927, 9.

[182] "Killers Skull to be Studied," *The Toledo Blade*, May 23, 1927, 1.

come by. Families who had multiple funerals to attend were unable to successfully negotiate the crowds, often making them late to their destination.[183] On Sunday, a minister and two funeral singers had to abandon their automobile and ride with a police officer on the back of his motorcycle in order to get to the funeral on time.[184] Whether one was on foot, riding a horse, or in an automobile, the crowds proved a persistent and formidable obstacle.[185]

Onlookers watched the many hearses go from funeral homes to homes of the deceased and finally to cemeteries. The police did the best they could to manage the crowd and preserve what little privacy was left for those who grieved. For reverends delivering eulogies in homes, words of compassion were interrupted by car horns and Model-T engines.[186] On Saturday, mourners on their way into church to attend the funeral of Nellie Price Kehoe got into a scuffle with photojournalists; they felt that the reporters were being too intrusive. The newsmen were forced across the street to try and capture the photographs they sought.[187] Mourning in Bath in the days following the bombings came with a certain level of chaos.

Though he was widely despised, there was still the issue of what should be done with what remained of Kehoe's body. Initially there was talk of having him shipped to Clinton Township, but this plan was abandoned.[188] Kehoe's body was never taken to an undertaker; it lay in the ditch until it was taken in a wicker basket to St. John's Cemetery on the evening of May 18.[189] The next day, one of Kehoe's sisters, Agnes Kehoe, claimed the remains and made funeral arrangements. She then left. On May 20, Andrew Kehoe's remains were delivered to Mt. Rest Cemetery.[190] He did not

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[183] Bernstein, 130.
[184] "Valley of Tears made Mecca of Curious during Funerals," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 1.
[185] Bernstein, 130.
[186] Bernstein, 130-131.
[187] "Maniac's Wife Laid to Rest," *Erie Daily Times: Saturday Theater, Radio, and Magazine Supplement*, May 21, 1927, 21.
[188] "Torn Remnants of Kehoe's Body Buried without Tears," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[189] "Unmourned, Unattended, Kehoe Buried in Unmarked Grave," *Lansing Capital News*, May 21, 1927, 1.
[190] "Kehoe's Remains Put in Unknown Grave, No Marker," *The Clinton County Republican News*, May 26, 1927, 6.

receive the rites even a hanged criminal usually obtained. There were no friends, no relatives, and no minister – just a few men lowering a box into a hole in the ground. They did not bother to cover the pile of loose dirt, as is typically the practice during a burial. The grave would never have a marker. The *Lansing Capital News* said that it was best that "no trace remain of the mad butcher of Bath."[191]

The Michigan Coroner held a legal proceeding which investigated and documented the details of Kehoe's crime. It lasted from May 23 to May 25, 1927, and was an "inquest into the circumstances surrounding the death of the Bath School Superintendent, Emory Eli Huyck, on May 18, 1927, in the village of Bath, Michigan."[192] Conducted by William C. Searl, Clinton County Prosecuting Attorney, the matter in question was the "explosion at the Bath Consolidated School, Bath, Michigan, and destruction of farm buildings at the farm of Andrew P. Kehoe, Bath Township, Clinton County, Michigan."[193] Fifty-five witnesses were questioned who were either witness to the disaster itself or to the character and activities of Kehoe. The jury consisted of Coroner C.E. Lamb and six local men.[194] They ultimately determined that Kehoe acted alone and was "sane at all times" during the planning and undertaking of his pre-meditated and deliberate plan, and that no school personnel were negligent in failing to discover Kehoe's intentions.[195]

Bath then began its long journey of recovery. It was a slow process. Injured children started to come home from the hospitals. The Kehoe farm and the ruins of the school remained in shambles

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[191] "Unmourned, Unattended, Kehoe Buried in Unmarked Grave," *Lansing Capital News*, May 21, 1927, 1.
[192] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Clinton County, Michigan, 1.

[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid., 1-4. The jury in addition to Lamb was: Edward Drumheller, Burt Wilcox, Clarence Tolman, Ishmel Everett, Wilmer Coleman, and Alton Church.
[195] *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, 268. Every witness who was asked about Kehoe's sanity agreed that he was sane. David Harte even went as far as to say he never knew a saner man. In one of the more interesting comments, when asked if she thought Kehoe was insane, Charlotte Howell replied, "Not unless it was cunning insanity." *Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck*, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of David Harte, 179, and testimony of Charlotte Howell, 145.

and were treated as places accursed. People no longer went near them for fear of additional dynamite and also not wanting to induce painful memories. The name of Andrew Kehoe was not spoken. Residents tried hard to forget. The world, on the other hand, largely seemed to have forgotten about the atrocities in Bath, as its attention had been diverted to the successful solo airplane flight of "Lucky Lindy."[196]

[196] Goll, 78.

Figure 12: This photograph was taken soon after disaster struck on May 18, 1927. Rescuers have not yet removed the massive collapsed roof of the north wing. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith. Photo credit: R.C. Leavenworth of Lansing, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Figure 13: This photograph was taken on the afternoon of the disaster. One can see the telephone pole that was used to bolster the front entrance against collapse and the ladders that were put into the shattered windows of the south wing so children could escape more easily. In the middle of the destroyed north wing, a coat closet is visible with children's coats still neatly hanging. Rescuers continue to comb the debris for the dead and injured. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith. Photo credit: R.C. Leavenworth of Lansing, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Figure 14: The children who were killed were laid out on sheets and blankets brought over from Bath homes. Frantic mothers and fathers lifted the edges of the blankets, hoping in a way that they would find their children, but even more so hoping that they would not find them there. If not found, their search led them to local hospitals. This area was dubbed "Hospital Hill" in some news coverage. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith. Photo credit: R.C. Leavenworth of Lansing, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Figure 15: Side view of what the school grounds looked like one week after the disaster. Photo credit: Van Horn Studios of Owosso, Michigan, May 26, 1927.

Figure 16: Front view of what the school grounds looked like one week after the disaster. Photo credit: Van Horn Studios of Owosso, Michigan, May 26, 1927.

The Rebuild

In the months that followed, the school grounds required intensive cleaning and clearing. It was soon discovered that not all of the explosive was successfully removed by authorities. On July 20, 1927, workers found a large sack of dynamite powder among the school ruins. They also unearthed a kerosene-soaked rug and some wood shavings shoved into one of the ventilators.[197] In early October of the same year, two boys who were playing in the ruins of the north wing found 244

[197] "Bath School Ruins Reveal More of Plot*," The Lansing State Journal*, July 21, 1927, 1.

sticks of dynamite as they were climbing around in the lower portion of the wrecked wing.[198] The sticks had been concealed beneath a false floor for five months.[199] This much dynamite could have destroyed what remained of the school, even as workers were starting the process of rebuilding. Since the disaster, thousands had walked over this volatile explosive. One newspaper used the headline, "Village Saved by Small Boys."[200] At that point, architect Warren Holmes instructed his crews to remove all ceilings during the remodeling and rebuilding of the school. This did little to assure some Bath residents of school safety. In fact, many initially did not want to rebuild on site at all.[201]

Days after the disaster, the sentiment among those on the school board and other Bath residents was to demolish what remained of the school and place a memorial park there for the deceased children.[202] On May 24, 1927, the school board had a conference call with Governor Fred Green; the talk at this time was still of building a completely new building on a new site. The governor assured the board that the rebuilding of the school would result in no financial hardship on the community.[203] One month later, Senator James Couzens officially offered to completely fund the rebuild. He and Warren Holmes, the original architect who designed Bath Consolidated School, proposed that it be rebuilt on the same site, even better than before, thereby erasing any physical mark that the tragedy left behind. The cost was to be between $80,000 and $100,000, which is the equivalent of $1.1 to $1.4 million dollars today.[204] The board members accepted Couzens' proposal, therefore abandoning the original idea to construct a new building on a different site.[205]

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[198] "Village Saved by Small boys," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 3, 1927, 6.
[199] "Dynamite in School Ruins," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1927, 19.
[200] "Village Saved by Small boys," 6.
[201] "School Yields More Dynamite," *The Lansing State Journal*, October 3, 1927, 1.
[202] "School Board Hopes for Aid," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 1.
[203] "New School at Bath Planned," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 24, 1927, 1.
[204] "Bath Accepts Couzens Offer," *The Lansing State Journal*, June 24, 1927, 1. Currency converter: http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/, retrieved on October 12, 2017.
[205] Ibid.

Figure 17: This photograph shows the James Couzens Agricultural School soon after its completion in the summer of 1928. Groups of children once again gather together there for play. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith.

The James Couzens Agricultural School served the Bath community for 47 years. When it was torn down in 1975, a memorial park was put in its place, the James Couzens Memorial Park.[206] The original cupola that stood atop the school since its original build in 1922 is preserved there. Another memorial artifact, the bronze "Girl with a Cat" sculpture which had resided in the entryway of the rebuilt school, was moved to Bath's new high school in 1976, a continuing beacon of hope for

[206] Betty Jane Minsky, "Wreckers prepared to raze 'Bath Disaster' school," *The Lansing State Journal*, December 9, 1975, B3.

area youth.[207] This sculpture was funded from coins donated from school children from all across Michigan soon after the disaster, and was crafted by sculptor Carlton W. Angell the following year. When the Bath School Museum opened in 1984 within Bath Middle School, the sculpture was moved there, becoming a prominent feature within the museum.[208]

[207] Burnett, 220.
[208] Sheila Schimpf, "Bath's attics opening to fill museum," *The Lansing State Journal*, October 26, 1984, 4B.

CHAPTER 3:

HEROES, MIRACLES, AND A MADMAN

"Two impressions will never be erased – the fiendish cruelty of the man who sent little children to their doom, and the nobility with which rescuers labored unceasingly to give aid to the stricken."[209]
The Lansing State Journal, May 19, 1927.

The location of a news organization is an important factor in determining the types of coverage produced in response to a tragedy. It influences the manner in which the story is presented, what themes are emphasized, and ultimately what influences media have within communities. The needs of an audience that is closest to a tragedy differ from its more distant observers. Media then assist in meaning-making particular to the audiences that they serve.[210] This chapter seeks to determine how the Bath disaster was portrayed by nearby press, regionally, and nationally.

Within the 1927 coverage of the Bath tragedy, three main themes emerged: tales of heroism, the presence of miracles, and the labeling of Andrew Kehoe as a crazed maniac. Newspaper articles with any mention of the tragedy were included in the sample for analysis, totaling 251 articles. Coverage was accessed via microfilm of these publications. Fifty-eight articles (23 percent) came from regional newspapers – defined as those between 100 and 350 miles of Bath, Michigan. These include: the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (2 articles), the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* (6), *The Chicago Daily News* (3), *The Youngstown Vindicator* (3), *The Youngstown Telegram* (6), the *Detroit Free*

[209] "Lansing Mourns with Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[210] James Hawdon, John Ryan, and Laura Agnich, "Media framing of a tragedy: A content analysis of print media coverage of the Virginia Tech tragedy," *Traumatology* 20, no. 3 (2014): 207.

Press (14), *The Toledo Blade* (9), the *Erie Daily Times* (8), *The Claire Sentinel* (1), and *The Saline Observer* (6). National articles, those from major metropolitan newspapers, made up approximately 8 percent of the sample – 19 articles. National publications included: *The New York Times* (7 articles), the *New York Evening Post* (1), *The Los Angeles Times* (2), the *Washington Post* (4), and *The Atlanta Constitution* (5). Making up the remainder of the sample (69 percent/174 articles) are nearby newspapers. Bath, being such a small township, had no newspaper of its own, yet four existed in nearby Lansing, about 15 miles away. They were: *Ingham County News* (1 article), *The Clinton County Republican News* (38), *Lansing Capital News* (37), and *The Lansing State Journal* (98).

Heroes

Newspapers at the time presented stories of the brave and the selfless – tales of heroism occurring during the rescue and recovery work in Bath. While heroism of the local rescuers was at least mentioned in all subsets of newspapers, the nearby newspapers made it a dominant theme and the topic of not just a paragraph within a larger story, but the headliner in many cases. From May 18 to May 27, nearby newspapers discussed Bath's heroes a total of 22 times, regional newspapers seven, and national newspapers once.

Newspapers closest to Bath focused on individuals who showed bravery in rescue work or kindness and philanthropy in efforts toward community healing. These heroes included teachers, police officers, doctors, nurses, firemen, housewives, construction workers, plant employees, power linemen, farmers, mechanics, cadets from Michigan State University, a governor, a senator, and a plumber. Citizens of Bath and surrounding communities from all walks of life worked together to try and ease the pain caused by the execution of Kehoe's plan.

The Lansing State Journal reported details of the first responders to the disaster scene. Linemen for the Consumers Power Company were constructing power lines on the street in front of the school building. They were the first witnesses to rush to the rescue of the injured and to begin carrying out the dead from the rubble.[211] The explosion was heard from a distance of at least six miles, as farmers heard it and came to see the cause of the noise and if they could help.[212] Soon after, five Lansing construction companies called all available men off of their jobs and rushed them to the school to begin aiding in rescue and recovery.[213] Employees of Olds Motor Works, the Fisher Body plant, and the Reo Motor Car company were sent by bus to Bath.[214] The Barker Fowler Electric Company answered the call for lighting equipment, providing large electric illuminators for lighting the scene of the disaster in preparation for nightfall. An emergency crew from the Michigan Bell Telephone Company hurried to the scene and strung up additional communication lines so that aid could be summoned more quickly.[215]

Within one hour, a field kitchen was set up by officers of the 119th Field Artillery, providing large numbers of army cots, blankets, food, and drink.[216] *The Lansing State Journal* also reported that classes at Michigan Agricultural College, later renamed Michigan State University, cancelled classes after learning of the disaster, and hundreds of college students, including uniformed ROTC cadets, came to assist. As the work dragged on for many hours, the women of Bath kept the work going by preparing coffee and sandwiches for the hundreds of working men.[217] Thirty-minute shifts were established, with some volunteers assigned to pulling out timbers at certain points and others

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[211] "Power Linemen First to Start Rescue Work," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[212] "Governor Urges State Aid for Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.
[213] "Firms of City Help at Bath," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 20, 1927, 3.
[214] "40 Known Dead, 40 Injured in Bath Schoolhouse Blast," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2. Three Fisher Body plant employees lost children in the school explosion.
[215] "Firms of City Help at Bath," 3.
[216] "Lansing 119th Supplies Blankets, Food at Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[217] "Governor Urges State Aid for Bath," 21; Eleanor Clapp Smith and Gloria Smith Bouterse, *Sparrow Tales: Memories from the Graduates, School of Nursing 1899-1961* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1987), 30.

assigned to digging deeper into the debris.[218] Unfortunately, very few farms in town owned a tractor, so rescuers had to rely on human strength, poles, and makeshift rope-and-pulley systems.[219] The newspapers closest to Bath brought out details of these mostly unnamed heroes.

Nearby newspapers pointed out that rescue efforts around the Bath Consolidated School were fraught with danger. Kehoe had planted the school with enough dynamite to destroy not only the school but also most of the small township of Bath. Though unexploded, this dynamite was still volatile, and the workers had no reliable method of knowing whether or not it would explode during their work. Workers carried out three full barrels of dynamite, seven full cement sacks, two full bushels of dynamite, and one bushel of black powder. While all of this explosive was safely carried out, one Bath man was knocked unconscious by a flying plank during this work.[220] An additional two rescue workers were injured that day; one broke an arm, the other a leg.[221] *The Lansing Capital News* printed a large photograph of rescuers working; it was titled "First Rescuers go into Ruins." The caption read, "Volunteers working at frantic speed regardless of danger of overhanging wreckage worked ceaselessly to remove the little bodies of the living and dead pinned in the debris."[222]

As pointed out by *The Lansing State Journal*, state troopers and government officials also risked their lives that day. State troopers Haldeman and McNaughton entered the school and pulled the caps from several boxes of dynamite that were set to explode, saying it was simply within their duty to do so.[223] Captain O'Brien of the Lansing Police Department assisted the two troopers, as did

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[218] "Desolated Village, Stoical in Sorrow, Cleaning up Ruins," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[219] Jack Storey, "Bath bombing survivor recalls nation's worst school murders," *The Sault News*, August 27, 2001.
[220] "Find 3 Barrels, 2 Bushels, and 7 Sacks of Dynamite," *Clinton County Republican News*, May 19, 1927, 2.
[221] "Scenes of Pathos Enacted by Awed Crowd at Bath," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 21.
[222] "First Rescuers go into Ruins," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 2.
[223] "Troopers Risk Lives, 'Only Duty,' They Say," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.

Deputy Sheriff William Klock.[224] Klock removed 18 pails of stick dynamite and eight sacks full of granulated explosive. He worked until late in the evening in the most dangerous part of the school – the basement where the intact dynamite was found. He also helped carry out the dead and injured.[225] The sheriff detailed to *The Toledo Blade* just how horrific and heart-breaking this rescue work could be; on one occasion, he was almost to the point of being able to lift a child to safety, only to witness him being crushed by falling bricks. Another time, Klock thought he had hold of a living child, and then realized the foot he was holding was no longer attached to the little girl.[226] Despite happenings such as these, rescuers persisted on with their work, according to newspapers.

Two other law enforcement officials brought the suspicious Kehoe package back with them to the East Lansing police station; at the time, all assumed that this package, which was mailed from Kehoe to Clyde Smith, contained explosive. They had no way of knowing it did not.[227] Firemen, who were faced with the task of removing debris, also showed great bravery, according to press accounts. They continued to clear debris even after unexploded dynamite had been found in other sections of the school. They stuck to their duty until being ordered away in preparation of explosive removal; many left exhausted as they worked very late into the afternoon.[228]

The press emphasized that there was likely not even one resident of Bath who did not act heroically on that fateful day. As pointed out by *The Toledo Blade*, "It is safe to say that every resident of Bath is an unsung hero. Many of them piloted cars at break-neck speed over gravel roads to Lansing with every minute meaning life or death to a bleeding little passenger in the rear seat.

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[224] "Bath Lauds Local Police, Firemen," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 1.
[225] "Governor Asks for Help to Replace Ruined School," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.

[226] Walter Schramm, "Maniac's Revenge Sends Forty-two to Death in Schoolhouse Blast," *The Toledo Blade*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[227] "Troopers Risk Lives, 'Only Duty,' They Say," 1.
[228] "Bath Lauds Local Police, Firemen," 1.

Others braved falling bricks and timber to rescue children trapped beneath a mass of wreckage."[229] *The Lansing Capital News* also noted that the quick action of Bath residents to speedily get as many to Lansing hospitals for care helped the outcome of many of the injured children. As of Tuesday, May 24, the majority of the 32 hospitalized children were reported to be doing well, with most due to be released by the end of the week. Of the more serious cases, none had relapsed. Doctors were encouraged by the fact that since Thursday, when fifth grade teacher Blanche Hart passed away, no more deaths had occurred. Forty-four deaths were reported in the first 24 hours, but none since.[230] Even the children who were reported by one newspaper as "near death" on May 20 ultimately survived.[231]

In addition to reporting about groups of people who acted heroically during rescue work in Bath, nearby newspapers also named and covered in detail individuals whose valiant efforts had significant impact. Many of these were school personnel who were there with the children at the time of the explosion. Not only did these teachers keep the children safe, they also kept them calm and orderly in a time which could easily have erupted into a panic.

As reported in the *Clinton County Republican News*, Floyd Huggett, Bath School principal, was two blocks away from the school when the blast occurred. He sprinted back and lifted at least seven children out of the wreckage. He also broke a hole through the debris into the classroom of teacher Leona Gutekunst and helped her lift a large cement block off of a little girl who was pinned beneath it. Gutekunst then handed the girl out of the classroom's window right into the arms of her father. Bernice Sterling, who taught the first and second grades, was leading her students in a lined march around the classroom when it happened. She simply reformed the line and marched them

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[229] Schramm, "Maniac's Revenge Sends Forty-two to Death in Schoolhouse Blast," *The Toledo Blade*, 2.
[230] "Blast Victims Gaining in Lansing Hospitals," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 24, 1927, 1.
[231] "New Building is Given by Senator Couzens," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 20, 1927, 1. The newspaper reported on this day that the following hospitalized children were near death: Gale Stableton, Helen Komm, Josephine England, Florence Hunter, and Donald Huffman. All survived.

right out of the building in perfect order. "I hardly knew what I was doing," she said. "I know now I must have done the right thing because everything went off so well. When all the children were safely outside, I went over and shut off the Victrola. I don't know why. When I got outside, I was so weak I could hardly stand," she told the newspaper.[232]

Frank Flory, the school's athletic director, was teaching on the second floor of the unaffected south wing at the time. He remained calm and told his students that there was nothing to worry about. He quickly helped them out of the building through the windows and onto the roof; no one was hurt.[233] Flory then jumped 14 feet down through an opening in the wreckage into the crushed north wing. He began getting children loose and handing them back up to the waiting hands of parents and rescuers, according to *The Lansing State Journal*.[234]

Evelyn Paul, home economics teacher at the school, was in her classroom on the first floor of the south wing with seven young girls in her care, as reported in *The Lansing State Journal*. They escaped through a shattered window, with Paul jumping down first and then catching each of the girls as they climbed from the window above and dropped down. They quickly ran away from the building toward the street. Unfortunately, this was when Kehoe fired his rifle at the dynamite in his truck, setting off a second massive explosion. In an instant, they witnessed Kehoe, Huyck, and the three others either dead or dying. Panicked and terrified, the little girls all held onto either Paul's hands or her skirt. The teacher did not know which way to go; behind them was the school in shambles, directly in front of them were the mangled and bloody forms of the victims of the second explosion, and before them in the distance flames and smoke emitted from the burning Kehoe farm.

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[232] "Bath Teachers Show Heroism in Rescuing their Pupils," *Clinton County Republican News*, May 26, 1927, 8. A Victrola was the Victor Talking Machine Company's brand of phonograph in the 1920s.
[233] Ibid.
[234] "Teacher, Pinned under Debris with Dead Boy, has Prayers Answered," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 13.

Paul decided to head for the vacant field about a block from the school. They huddled together in the center of the field. After a while, after instructing the girls to remain where they were, Paul ventured back to the scene to alert frantic parents to the location of her seven and begin assisting in rescue and first aid.[235]

Frank Smith, school janitor, was in the north wing basement at the time of the wing's collapse. The *Detroit Free Press* reported that he was thrown against a wall and badly bruised but was fortunate to not have been crushed. He ran to the floor above and began lifting children out of the debris. He could hear the moans and cries of the children, as the smoke began to subside. He began digging with his hands. "We dug down to a little girl whose face was mashed in. Someone carried her away. We were guided by the cries for help and liberated several of the victims."[236] It was Frank Smith's brother, Glenn Smith, Bath postmaster, who would be killed just moments later as a result of Kehoe's truck blast.

Some who were venerated as heroes in the press did not survive. When extricated from the school ruins, the body of teacher Hazel Weatherby revealed that she died trying to save the lives of two of her students. Weatherby's body was found in an upright position, with the tiny still body of a child under each arm. She was making a desperate attempt, at the almost certain submission of her own life, to shield as many children as possible from the falling bricks and debris. The tiny hands of the children when they found the trio were still gripped tightly to Weatherby's dress. This was detailed in a *Lansing State Journal* article titled "Find Teacher Died Heroine."[237]

Saved by death in the first blast, Superintendent Emory Huyck met his demise just minutes later when Kehoe set off the second explosion. As detailed in *The Lansing Capital News*, Huyck was

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[235] "M.S.C. Graduate, Teacher at Bath School, has Thrilling Memories," *The Lansing State Journal,* May 19, 1927, 2.
[236] "Madman in High Glee when Children Die," *Detroit Free Press,* May 19, 1927, 8.
[237] Ted Christie, "Find Teacher Died Heroine," *The Lansing State Journal,* May 19, 1927, 2.

teaching in the upstairs assembly room in the unaffected south wing when the first blast happened.[238] Huyck's student Anson McNatt jumped to the classroom door after the explosion to escape into the hallway but it was full of smoke and plaster. "Then Mr. Huyck yelled for us to climb out the window. We slid down that shed roof and jumped to the ground or climbed down the ladder. Mr. Huyck saw that we were all out safe and then he rushed around to the front to see what he could do," McNatt said.[239] Huyck was killed 15 to 20 minutes later.

Not all who were deemed heroes by the press were teachers or school personnel. Lenora Babcock, operator at the local telephone exchange, was working when the blasts occurred. She was the first person to inform the surrounding communities of the disaster. Babcock's younger brother and sister were in the school that day. Despite this and not knowing their whereabouts or status, *The Lansing State Journal* reported that she worked her post for several hours until other operators from Lansing could arrive to relieve her. Both of her siblings were injured but survived.[240] Lyle Zufelt, a road worker, was working in front of Bath Consolidated School on that morning. Zufelt knew his boy was in the school, and this thought drove him "almost crazy," he stated. He began frantically pulling as many children as possible out of the rubble. "I pulled five boys out of a hole not big enough for one, and one boy broke his leg as we were getting him out," he said.[241] Fortunately, Bobbie Zufelt, his 6-year-old son, escaped unharmed while Zufelt was searching for him.

Titling it "One-Armed Plumber Among Blast Heroes," *The Lansing State Journal* printed a photograph of George Harrington, who was working on the boiler in the basement of the south wing at the time of the explosion. After first running upstairs and helping children out of the south building, Harrington ran to the wrecked north wing to see how he could help. He held a door open

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[238] "Bath Teachers Show Heroism in Rescuing their Pupils," 8.
[239] "Children Led to Safety by Cool Teacher," *The Lansing Capital News,* May 19, 1927, 1.
[240] "Bath Phone Operator Sticks to her Post," *The Lansing State Journal,* May 19, 1927, 1.
[241] "Eyewitnesses of Blast Relate their Experiences," *The Lansing State Journal,* May 19, 1927, 21.

for teacher Bernice Sterling so she could carry her children to safety.[242] "The children were moaning and screaming, and it was almost enough to make a strong man faint. I saw some of the boys and I did everything I could but I could not stand it long. If I had known there were two or three bushels of dynamite right over my head in the basement, I think I would have dropped dead," Harrington told the newspaper.[243]

One-Armed Plumber Among Blast Heroes

GEORGE L. HARRINGTON, THE first man to the rescue in the Bath disaster Wednesday and one of those numbered among the heroes of the blast. Mr. Harrington, a plumber, was working in the south section of the school building when several hundred pounds of dynamite tore off the north wing. He held a door in the wrecked part of the building open while Miss Stirling, a teacher, carried children to safety. Mr. Harrington has but one arm.

Figure 18: "One-armed Plumber among Blast Heroes," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 2.

[242] "One-armed Plumber among Blast Heroes," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 2.
[243] "Eyewitnesses of Blast Relate their Experiences," 21.

Bath farmer George Hall, along with four other men who lived close by, even tried to help Kehoe when they noticed his property ablaze, according to *The Lansing State Journal*. Upon seeing flames coming from Kehoe's buildings, they stopped their work and hurried to the Kehoe farm to help. Seeing that they could not save the barn, they hurried into the home and began pulling out as many valuables and as much furniture as they could. As the newspaper reported, their work continued for a few minutes until one noticed that the home was packed with dynamite. "My God!" he exclaimed. "There is enough dynamite in there to blow up the county!"[244] The five fled. Hall, knowing of Kehoe's hatred for the school and suspecting the worst, hurried there. He drove up just in time to see Kehoe call Huyck to his truck. A moment later, the second explosion made Kehoe disappear, it seemed to Hall as if by magic. Hall was blinded and dazed, but uninjured. The truck's seat cushion on which he was sitting was ripped by shrapnel. In a cruel twist, Hall's two children, George Jr. and Willa, were killed by the very man he had worked so hard to help just minutes prior. His 6-year-old son, Billy, survived.[245]

While area citizens physically did all they could for the relief work, financially Bath was not in an ideal position. The Bath Consolidated School was already in a deficit prior to the disaster, and an architect estimated that it would take between $80,000 and $100,000 to rebuild the damaged part of the school.[246] (In 2017 U.S. dollars, this is between 1.1 and 1.4 million.)[247] Wealthy politicians stepped in and were also hailed as heroes in nearby press. Michigan Governor Fred Green offered to pay the funeral expenses of any family who lost a child who could not afford to do so.[248] Governor Green and his wife also raced to the scene on the day of the disaster, physically doing all they could

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[244] "Kehoe Sped to Destroy School as Neighbors Rallied to Assist Him," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 2.
[245] Ibid.
[246] "What Bath Township Faces," *Clinton County Republican News*, May 26, 1927, 1.

[247] Accessed on March 29, 2017, http://www.in2013dollars.com/1927-dollars-in-2017?amount=100000.
[248] "Governor Offers to Pay Funeral Expense," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.

to assist.[249] Several newspapers reported that Senator James Couzens pledged to help financially in any way needed, including completely funding the rebuilding of the school.[250] When the school reopened on August 18, 1928, it was named the James Couzens Agricultural School.

By sharing stories of these various heroes, who were quick to help friends and strangers alike to the best of their individual ability, press coverage of the Bath disaster revealed a formidable sense of community – one whose members were willing to face tragedy with courage and caring. The energy with which rescuers work can act to reassure victims that there is still hope within the wreckage.[251] Sociologist Kai Erikson, who studied communities devastated by environmental disasters, stated that, "It is as if survivors, digging out from under the masses of debris, discover that the communal body is not only intact but mobilizing its remaining resources to dress the wound on its flank."[252] As the newspapers celebrated the heroic contributions of both the dead and the living, township solidarity was likely strengthened.[253] This type of coverage is important because it can shape the collective understanding of a disaster, ultimately leading to a more hopeful view of the tragedy.[254]

Stories of sacrifice and death in journalism are ultimately optimistic and look toward the future.[255] Edward Linenthal, when discussing the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, called aspects of its coverage a "progressive narrative." The story told of victims and survivors but focused even more on the admirable efforts of rescue volunteers. As in Bath, the rescuers came from all walks of life:

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[249] "Governor and Wife Take Places with Relief Force," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[250] "Senator Couzens may Rebuild School," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[251] Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community* (New York: Norton, 1994), 235.

[252] Ibid., 236.
[253] Carolyn Kitch and Janice Hume, *Journalism in a Culture of Grief* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 20.
[254] Katherine Fry, *Constructing the Heartland: Television News and Natural Disaster* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2003).
[255] Kitch and Hume, 151.

nurses, doctors, other survivors, clergy, various local citizens, and non-profits, to name a few. He stated, "If the bombing was an event that would be remembered as a terrorist act of mass murder, the response would be recalled as a heroic saga, a moral lesson to be told and sung and celebrated for generations to come."[256] A progressive narrative, as was used in coverage of bombings in Bath and Oklahoma City, asks people to focus on possibility, healing, and rebuilding. It celebrates the essential goodness of Americans, a trait brought to the forefront by the selfless acts of rescuers responding to the tragedies.[257]

While Kehoe had committed the ultimate heinous act, the response, as reported heavily in nearby newspapers, was equally strong in its authentic altruism. In documenting these heroes, media may have played a vital role in molding perspective and ultimately in healing of the grief-stricken township. Without this coverage, many stories of the efforts of specific individuals would be lost to history. In addition to pointing out heroes, newspapers of 1927 also discussed some of the seeming miracles that happened that day, not the least of which was the fact that 504 pounds of dynamite and pyrotol failed to explode in the south wing of the building, saving a multitude of children and teachers.[258]

Miracles

After the disaster, small groups gathered on Bath's streets to discuss in low voices what could have been and what was, according to *The Los Angeles Times*.[259] The most alarming fact was that Kehoe's plan, though horrific and deadly, was largely unsuccessful. Kehoe, an educated man who had worked for years as an electrician in the Navy, had thoroughly and intricately wired the entire

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[256] Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46.
[257] Ibid., 53.
[258] "Jury Verdict Blames Kehoe, Clinton County Jurors Hold Man Sane during Crime," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 26, 1927, 1.
[259] "Help Given Bereaved," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1927, 4.

building for complete annihilation. The hundreds of pounds of dynamite in the unexploded south wing were found in cleverly concealed holes in the basement walls, behind rafters, and even in little cubby holes designed for the storage of books.[260] He had carefully connected an alarm clock, which was the impetus for the explosion, two hotshot batteries, and wiring to the dynamite.[261] The wiring was so expertly done, in the manner in which the wires were soldered and the dynamite tamped, that at first investigators thought more than one person had done the work.[262]

Several cement bags full of gunpowder were found in the floors of the kindergarten classrooms, where on that morning almost 100 children of ages 4 and 5 were learning and playing. These bags were connected to dynamite by wiring concealed under the flooring. An additional three bushels of dynamite were found in the floor of the first and second grade classrooms in the south wing. When the north wing collapsed, this dynamite fell down to the basement floor, but miraculously did not explode, as it landed on a canvas awning which cushioned its fall.[263] Nearly nine bushels of dynamite, 504 pounds, were removed from the south wing by the afternoon. Authorities determined that this was enough explosive to kill every person inside the school, and to send further death and destruction into the township.[264] Deputy Sheriff Klock assisted in the removal of the wired dynamite from the coal bin, boiler, and rafters of the south wing's basement. He testified that there was enough dynamite hidden in the school to blow up the entire town.[265]

Kehoe had driven to the school expecting to see the entire building razed by his work, and all occupants, including children, dead.[266] There were 236 students in the school when the explosion occurred at around 8:45 am CST, about 15 minutes after classes began. Only a short circuit in the

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[260] Walter Schramm, "Crazed Man Bore Grudge against Life in General," *The Toledo Blade*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[261] "Governor Asks Help to Replace Ruined School," 1.
[262] "Fate's Whim Foils Plot to Sacrifice All Pupils," *Youngstown Vindicator*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[263] "School Blast Slays Madman and 4 Adults," *Detroit Free Press*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[264] "Recover Dynamite," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 1.
[265] Margrete Daney, "Villagers Turn to Prayer after School Tragedy," *The Toledo Blade*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[266] "School Blast Slays Madman and 4 Adults," 1.

wires leading to the south wing saved the majority of these children and teachers from certain death.[267] As *The Toledo Blade* pointed out, "It is considered nothing short of a miracle that these hundreds of pounds of dynamite did not explode."[268] *The Lansing State Journal* stated that, "How any living being inside the walls escaped appears to be a miracle."[269] This fortunate aspect of "what could have been" was highlighted by multiple newspapers.

Chief Delfs of the Lansing Fire Department was called directly after the first explosion, as people logically thought a fire would follow.[270] Had there been a fire, the death toll would have increased substantially, as many of the injured were trapped under collapsed walls, bricks, and other debris.[271] This occurrence is even more remarkable when one considers that Kehoe had a backup plan, in the case of his alarm clock apparatus failing to ignite the dynamite. In one section of the south wing basement, police discovered a gasoline container. It was modified such that the expansion of the gas would force vapor through a tube to a spark gap where it could have been exploded by pressing a button linked to an electrical current. In the event of a failure, investigators believed Kehoe planned to set off the gasoline and burn the entire building.[272] With volatile plants such as this one in the building, fire seemed a likely result.

As *The Lansing Capital News* pointed out, miraculous escapes, even of those in the crushed north wing, did indeed occur. Student Ray McGonigal was standing near a window in a classroom on the first floor when the dynamite exploded. The blast launched him through the window but propelled him clear of any falling debris. He was severely jarred upon hitting the ground but was basically uninjured.[273] Another child, 12-year-old Clare Gates, was standing in the manual training

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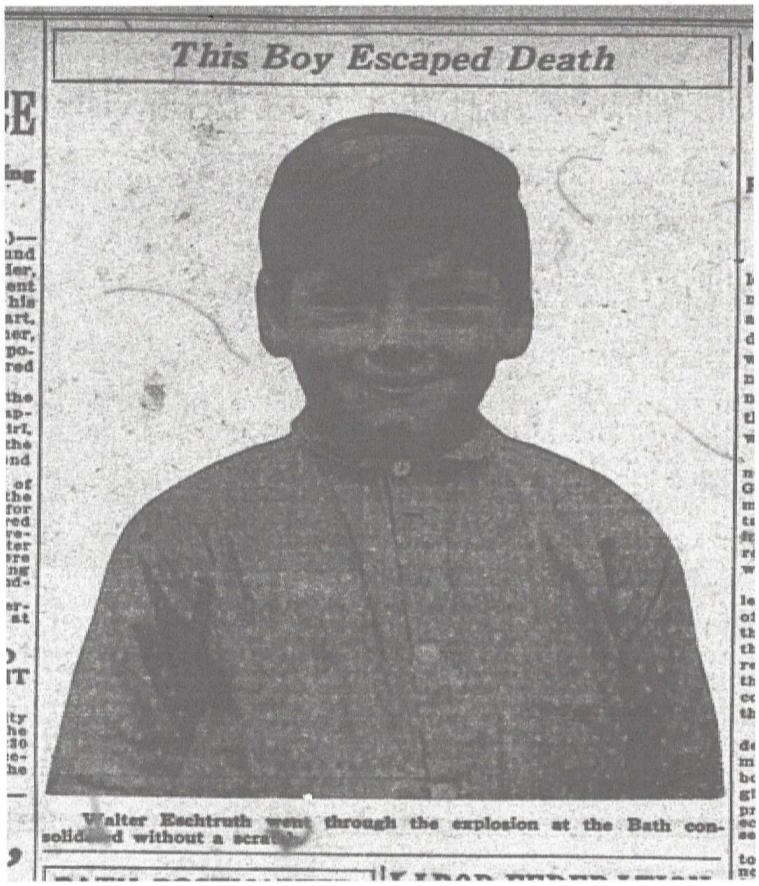
[267] "School Head's Labor Wrecked," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[268] "Pictures Tell Vivid Story of School Tragedy," *The Toledo Blade*, May 19, 1927, 30.
[269] "Governor Asks for Help to Replace Ruined School," 1.
[270] "Lansing Rallies to Aid of Stricken Neighbor Town," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[271] "Maniac Slays 36 Children, 5 Adults, Self," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[272] "Hint Accomplice in School Blast," *The Chicago Daily News*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[273] "Children Led to Safety by Cool Teacher," 1.

room on the first floor. He was also blown through a rear window in a similar manner. He skidded along the ground outside and ran.[274] The *Detroit Free Press* featured a prominent photograph of student Walter Eschtruth, dubbing him the boy who "escaped death," noting he lived through the explosion "without a scratch."[275]


This Boy Escaped Death

Walter Eschtruth went through the explosion at the Bath consolidated without a scratch

Figure 19: "This Boy Escaped Death," *Detroit Free Press*, May 20, 1927, 3.

[274] "Scenes of Pathos Enacted by Awed Crowd at Bath," 21. Also discussed in: "Maniac Blows up School, Kills 42, mostly Children," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1927, 1.
[275] "This Boy Escaped Death," *Detroit Free Press*, May 20, 1927, 3.

The Lansing State Journal recounted the story of rescuers lifting a large section of roof. As they did, two frightened children, uninjured, quickly ran away and disappeared into the crowd.[276] The roof's awning, upon falling on the children, had left just enough room beneath it for them not to be crushed. Rescue workers also told the newspaper of one little boy whose experience was particularly memorable. He was found under a large pile of debris and appeared lifeless. They gingerly removed all debris, in reverence to this tragic loss of life. As the last of it was removed, however, the boy opened his eyes, sat up, shook his head of the plaster dust, and uttered one word: "whew." He then abruptly ran off. His identity was never established, but it was something that the rescuers never forgot.[277]

Rescuer Robert Gates, one of the first to the scene, was assisting Guy Richardson in attempts to unearth children from the wreckage. He heard a little girl's voice coming from about a foot down in the debris. She was calling, "Daddy, Daddy, come and get me." Bates recalled, "There was a heavy board pinning her down, and I made up my mind the only thing to do was to break it free." Not knowing the identity of the girl, he assured her that her father was coming. He broke the board and pulled her to safety. She was not injured, and she turned out to be Richardson's daughter, who was working alongside Gates. He hugged his daughter and then took her to her mother, who was working in another section of the school at the time.[278]

The Lansing State Journal told the harrowing tale of 24-year-old teacher Eva Gubbins who spent one hour in prayer trapped under the wreckage. A journalist interviewed her from her hospital bed on May 20. Gubbins was on the second floor of the north wing when it collapsed. She recalled a

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[276] "Scenes of Pathos Enacted by Awed Crowd at Bath," 21.
[277] George Alderton, "Lansing Rescue Workers Discover Body of Kehoe," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1; Vina Shepherd Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, July 28, 2005, Ashton, Michigan, part of Sparrow Hospital Oral History Program, audio courtesy of Sparrow Health Sciences Library. Fisk's father was one of these rescuers, and he recounted this story to her.
[278] "Maniac Bomber's Wife Among his 43 Victims," *Youngstown Telegram*, May 19, 1927, 1.

deafening explosion and she then lost consciousness. When she awoke, she was lying across an iron radiator with an immense concrete beam resting upon her numb legs. Tragically, on its way down, this beam struck a little boy, killing him and pinning his body also across Gubbins' legs. There was so much wreckage in close proximity to her that she could not even turn her head from side to side. She told the reporter that the only thing she could do was close her eyes in prayer or open them, but when she did, her point of view was the lifeless eyes of the little boy whose face was just a few inches from hers. She chose to close her eyes in fervent prayer.[279]

There was an opening to Gubbins' right just large enough to fit a human body; suddenly, a man's head appeared and said, "Eva, I can't get you out – we can pray." It was Frank Flory who was on his way to help pull children to safety. Gubbins had to wait until all the wreckage had been cleared away above her before the large beam that had been supporting all above could be moved. The rescuers then had to construct a large frame under the supporting column and then break this column apart piece by piece with sledgehammers. After this, the beam which pinned Gubbins and the child could be removed. It took the rescuers 45 minutes to complete this work.[280]

Many newspapers reported on what happened in Leona Gutekunst's classroom. It was located in the south wing with classroom walls adjacent to the north wing. She was reading her first and second graders a story that morning at the start of the school day. It being almost the last day of school, her students begged her to read just one more story before beginning their work on the blackboard.[281] She would at times sit and read to them at the back of the room, so the students asked if she would do this one more time.[282]

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[279] "Teacher, Pinned under Debris with Dead Boy, has Prayers Answered," 13.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Charles Ahrens, "School Picnic Day in Bath One of Tragedy and Sorrow," *Youngstown Telegram*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[282] Vina Shepherd Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, July 28, 2005; "Bath," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.

"I did something that I hadn't done all the year, when I overran my first class period by telling the children a story," she told *The Clinton County Republican News*. It was perhaps the children that saved her life, she said, as they were the ones begging for another story and calling her to the back of the room. "Suddenly, the first blast came," she continued. "It seemed as if the end of the world had come, everything got dark, the children screamed and some of the bigger ones had presence of mind to rush out before the upper floor crashed through."[283] If Guntekunst had been running on schedule and had not heeded the children's pleas, the entire class, teacher included, would have been at the front of the room at the blackboard, which was wrecked when the blast came. This story saved their lives.[284]

By focusing on the positivity of perceived miracles occurring on this tragic day, nearby and regional newspapers were able to add a glimmer of hope to the traumatized township – a reason for gratitude even on Bath's darkest day. Pointing out Bath's blessings early on in the disaster forged a pathway toward future community healing.

Maniacal Andrew Kehoe

The fact that jury members at the official inquest deemed Andrew Kehoe "sane at all times" during the planning and undertaking of his "pre-meditated and deliberate plan" did little to deter newspapers from calling him a maniac.[285] This moniker (and those similar) were splashed across headlines from coast to coast. Newspapers far and near painted a picture of a crazed man, a demented farmer whose hatred of high taxes and stress over finances drove him to insanity, pushing him to commit the unthinkable.

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[283] "Bath Teachers Show Heroism in Rescuing their Pupils," 8.
[284] "Mrs. Kehoe's Body Found on Cart," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1. The subheading of the section discussed here is titled, "Long Story Hour Saves Babes."
[285] "Jury Verdict Blames Kehoe, Clinton County Jurors Hold Man Sane during Crime," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 26, 1927, 1.

Declaring Kehoe mentally unstable was immediate. On May 18, 1927, the day of the tragedy, the front page of *The New York Times* exclaimed, "Maniac Blows up School, Kills 42, Mostly Children."[286] Similarly, *The Washington Post* on May 19 stated in bold text, "38 Die by Blast as Insane Farmer Dynamites School."[287] Closer to Bath, *The Clinton County Republican News* said, "Andrew P. Kehoe, Demented Farmer, Transforms Whole Community into Vast Morgue and Hospital."[288] *The New Century Dictionary of the English Language* in 1927 defined mania as "a form of insanity characterized by great excitement, with or without delusions, and in its acute stage by great violence," and a maniac as "one affected with mania; raving with madness; mad; frantic; a raving lunatic; a madman."[289] Considering these era definitions, it is easy to see how journalists of the day thought the name fitting for Kehoe.

While regional newspapers presented Kehoe as a madman, some also simultaneously presented another image of Kehoe – a man of intelligence, a good citizen, a good friend, but also someone with a bad temper and a pugnacious personality. On May 19, the *Detroit Free Press* exclaimed in bold, "Madman in High Glee when Children Die." This rather grim article began as follows: "A demented, middle-aged farmer sat in his car and laughed with glee as he watched nearly two score little children blown to death. Andrew Kehoe, farmer, electrician, graduate of the Michigan State College, and treasurer of the Bath township school board, turned his maniacal genius to the work of destruction because his taxes were too high."[290] The next day, however, the newspaper headlined, "Kehoe just Murderous, declares Supervisor; Not Crazy but had Uncontrollable Temper." In this article, Bath township supervisor S.E. Ewing, whose 11-year-old

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[286] "Maniac Blows up School, Kills 42, mostly Children," *The New York Times,* May 18, 1927, 1.
[287] "38 Die by Blast as Insane Farmer Dynamites School," *The Washington Post,* May 19, 1927, 1.
[288] "Andrew P. Kehoe, Demented Farmer, Transforms Whole Community into Vast Morgue and Hospital," *The Clinton County Republican News,* May 19, 1927, 1.
[289] *The New Century Dictionary of the English Language*, "Mania," "Maniac," (New York: Century, 1927), 1012-1013.
[290] "Madman in High Glee when Children Die," *Detroit Free Press,* May 19, 1927, 8.

son, Earl, was killed in the disaster, said Kehoe was not crazy but "murderously inclined" with a temper so fiery that he would curse and damn people who disagreed with him at school board meetings.[291]

Two days later, however, the *Detroit Free Press* again deemed him a "mad murderer."[292] Even more striking, it ran an article on the same day diagnosing the specific mental disorder from which Kehoe allegedly suffered. In this article, Dr. Dale King, a neurologist who had not met Kehoe personally, diagnosed him with dementia praecox with persecutory delusions – a "fearful example of a diseased mind" and an "unmoral, anti-social type." King blamed Kehoe's parents, saying he did not receive "proper child training," thus leading to his maniacal tendency.[293] Similarly, the nearby *Lansing State Journal* printed that physicians of the city of Owosso believed Kehoe to be manic depressive. They discussed this diagnostic decision at a staff dinner at Memorial Hospital on May 22, 1927.[294]

Two other regional publications, *The Toledo Blade* and the *Erie Daily Times*, also went back and forth between presenting Kehoe as a maniac and describing him as a good citizen. *The Toledo Blade*, after using the term maniac to describe Kehoe five times in headlines from May 19 to May 23, ran the following story on May 24: "Dynamiter of School had Good Reputation." This article detailed how the "maniac" who caused so many deaths had many friends and was respected – the last one that the villagers thought would turn out to be the "super-killer" who so cruelly took the lives of their children. Kehoe's friend, Sidney Howell, called Kehoe a good friend, not a skilled farmer, but an expert at fixing machinery.[295] The *Erie Daily Times* called Kehoe a madman, a maniac, and even

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[291] "Kehoe just Murderous, declares Supervisor," *Detroit Free Press*, May 20, 1927, 8.
[292] "Bath Buries 17 Victims of Mad Murderer," *Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 1927, 1.
[293] "Kehoe Victim of Delusions," *Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 1927, 4.
[294] "Owosso Doctors Give Opinion," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 18.
[295] "Dynamiter of School had Good Reputation," *The Toledo Blade*, May 24, 1927, 1.

a demon in one case.[296] But, on May 20, it published an article which detailed the complex relationship Kehoe shared with fellow Bath citizens; it was titled "'Andy Kehoe was Smart' – People Excuse his Acts, while Maniacal." While the townspeople did not find him neighborly, the article said that they did admire Kehoe's intelligence and his knack for math and accounting. Although people found him surly and at times he acted odd and distant, he was a trusted member of the tight-knit community.[297]

The newspapers closest to Bath utilized the word "fiend" in describing Kehoe as much as they used "maniac." Fiend in 1927 was defined as: "an enemy, specifically the enemy of mankind; Satan; the devil; hence, any evil spirit; a demon; also, a diabolically wicked person, especially in the way of cruelty and malignity."[298] A headline in the May 19 *Clinton County Republican News* read, "Fiend Dynamites School, Kills 44." Featured below this was a large photo taken from the front of the school, the north end collapsed; the caption read, "Where 40 Children were Dynamited to Death."[299] *The Lansing Capital News* reported, "A True Picture of Andrew Kehoe; Time Turns up Likeness of Fiend."[300]

The Lansing State Journal described Kehoe as a fiend four times in headlines from May 18 to May 20, in one of these cases utilizing the term arch-fiend, as in the headline, "Body of Arch-fiend Blown to Bits."[301] The same newspaper dubbed Kehoe the "demoniac dynamiter" in their piece, "Torn Remnants of Fiend's Body Buried without Tears."[302] Perhaps the most impassioned and

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[296] "Fix Blast on Demon," *Erie Daily Times*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[297] "Andy Kehoe was Smart – People Excuse his Acts, while Maniacal," *Erie Daily Times*, May 20, 1927, 4.
[298] *The New Century Dictionary of the English Language*, "Fiend," (New York: Century, 1927), 567.

[299] "Fiend Dynamites School, Kills 44," *The Clinton County Republican News*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[300] "A True Picture of Andrew Kehoe; Time Turns up Likeness of Fiend," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 28, 1927, 1.
[301] "Body of Arch-fiend Blown to Bits," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2. According to *The New Century Dictionary of the English Language*, in 1927, an arch-fiend was defined as: a chief fiend; Satan.
[302] "Torn Remnants of Fiend's Body Buried without Tears," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.

eloquent account of Kehoe's fiendish persona came from Dr. Edwin W. Bishop, local pastor and president of the Ingham county chapter of the American Red Cross. He addressed his congregation on May 22, 1927, with the following account, reported by *The Lansing State Journal*:

> Like a black portentous cloud rising from the sea, the arch-fiend, after imbruing his hands in his wife's blood, and annihilating his home along with every living thing thereon, drives hastily to view the final chapter of his diabolical ingenuity. He has accumulated and arranged enough explosive to blow the heart out of the village. The stage is all set. Teachers are looking into expectant childish faces when suddenly floors are upheaved, side walls crumble into nothingness, the roof comes crashing down, stifling black smoke and plaster dust fill the air, and death reigns where a moment ago life was exuberant.[303]

Some in Bath and Lansing believed Kehoe's actions to be the will of God, but Dr. Bishop's sermon made it clear that it was Kehoe's choices, not the divine will of God, that had caused death and destruction to fall on Bath. *The Lansing State Journal*'s reprinting and discussion of Bishop's sermon is an example of the redemptive narrative – a narrative which emerges from a religious community's struggle to mobilize and respond to the crisis of meaning brought on by human violence. Mass murder has potential to undermine deep convictions, such as the belief that God is loving, just, kind, and all-powerful.[304] A stance that the Bath bombing resulted simply from bad choices within human free will allows one to avoid questioning God's goodness or justice – doubts that could potentially weaken one's faith.[305]

Nearby newspapers also questioned Kehoe's sanity, and, in contrast to regional and national publications, they were more likely to highlight Kehoe's farming profession. This can be seen in headlines such as: "Andrew P. Kehoe, Demented Farmer, Transforms Whole Community into Vast Morgue and Hospital" (*Clinton County Republican News*, May 26), "Authorities find Demented

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[303] "Local Pastor Sees Human Depravity Alone Responsible for Bath Horror," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 11.
[304] Linenthal, 42.
[305] Ibid., 57.

Farmer Planted more than 500 Pounds of Dynamite, Set off Blast from Car" (*The Lansing State Journal*, May 18), and "Believe Crazed Farmer Killed Wife with Blow on Head before Taking to Destructive Trail" (*The Lansing State Journal*, May 19).

The Lansing State Journal published a front-page article on May 20 which declared "Slain Woman's Uncle Claims Kehoe Insane." Here, Richard Price, Nellie's uncle and also an executor for the sale of the Bath farm that the Kehoes purchased in 1918, said that Kehoe for some time had been "in an ugly frame of mind," brooding over taxes and also continually obsessed with the notion that he had paid too much for the farm.[306] On the next page, however, he was portrayed as an inventive genius who constructed electrical devices as a youth to help farming efforts on his father's farm in Tecumseh. He was considered a bit distant and aloof as a young man, but also intelligent and a good student.[307]

The nearby *Ingham County News* declared Kehoe diabolical, but certainly not maniacal, saying his planning exhibited the logical steps of a well-planned scheme. "Calm and collected, the killer went about his work as a careful man in any momentous undertaking would proceed," it said.[308] *The Lansing Capital News* criticized other newspapers' use of the word "maniac" in describing Kehoe. In its headlines of Kehoe, he was demented, a madman, crazed, and a fiend, but never a maniac. On the front page of the May 28 edition, the newspaper published a photograph of Kehoe, stating at the article's start, "This is Andrew Kehoe – dubbed by news writers 'the butcher of Bath' and by some of the less sophisticated as the 'maniac of Bath.'" It goes on to describe him as "the blasphemer," "the arch-criminal of Michigan," and "the demon."[309] Despite what it chose to call

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[306] "Slain Woman's Uncle Claims Kehoe Insane," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[307] "Kehoe as Boy made Electrical Devices," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 2.
[308] "Diabolical, not Maniacal," *Ingham County News*, May 26, 1927.
[309] "A True Picture of Andrew Kehoe; Time Turns up Likeness of Fiend," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 28, 1927, 1.

Kehoe, *The Lansing Capital News* followed the lead of other newspapers when it reported that Kehoe was in fact declared sane by a coroner's jury on May 26, 1927. It stated:

> He was sane, according to the findings of the jury, when he slew his wife and placed her body in a hog chute. He was sane when he set off a charge of dynamite that killed 37 school children and three teachers. He was still sane when he fired at dynamite in his car, destroying himself and three others. And all that tallies with the verdict of his neighbors who say that he was not mad – simply a beastial type of man.[310]

The idea that Kehoe's nature leaned more toward beast than human was echoed in other publications as people sought an answer as to how anyone could commit so heinous an act. Margrete Daney, a staff writer for *The Toledo Blade,* queried on May 23, "What freak mental twist led Andrew Kehoe, farmer, to murder 44 children and adults? What queer streak in his make-up made him plan with demonic cunning, the dynamiting of a school filled with small children? What caused Kehoe to be a super-killer?"[311] To some, the answer lay in human evolution, to a throwback to more primitive ages within the history of humankind. They thought Kehoe to be exhibiting atavism. Atavism is the recurrence in an organism of a trait or character typical of an ancestral form and usually due to genetic recombination.[312] Some thought Kehoe had simply not developed genetically at the same pace as the rest of society.

Dismissing the theory that Kehoe was insane, popular *Lansing Capital News* columnist W.A.M. called Kehoe an atavist and an aberrant type, a "Neanderthal man, living and acting in a century 25,000 years removed from his physical type." When Kehoe's knowledge of modern science met with his "middle Paleolithic emotions," a super-criminal was born.[313] He went on to say, "If

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[310] Ibid. Beastial is a common misspelling of bestial, which is defined as: like a beast in qualities or behavior; brutish or savage; brutal, coarse, vile, etc. From: *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, "bestial," Accessed February 22, 2017, http://www.yourdictionary.com/bestial.
[311] Margrete Daney, "Killer's Skull to be Studied," *The Toledo Blade,* May 23, 1927, 1.
[312] *Merriam-Webster*, "atavism," Accessed February 22, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/atavism.
[313] W.A.M., "Tragedy," *The Lansing Capital News,* May 20, 1927, 1.

Andrew Kehoe had lived in his proper age, he could have clubbed his horse to death without criticism. He could have beaten his wife to death if she did not please him. Both were chattels in the age to which his mind belonged."[314]

People who knew Kehoe remarked that he had strange ridges across his forehead and across the back of his head.[315] It is possible that these abnormalities were caused by head injuries. Around 1912, Kehoe fell and injured his head while in attendance at an electrical school. He was in a coma-like state for two months. More recently, he was struck by a falling tree limb on his farm in Bath.[316] W.A.M. commented, "We know his skull. It was so interesting that we have followed him for blocks hoping that he would remove his hat. We never realized the terrible potentialities of that head. He was not an insane man. He was a man from the peat bogs unchanged in the elemental things of thousands of years of progress."[317] In fact, Kehoe's skull was so intriguing that what remained of it was requested by a university in Michigan for post-mortem analysis.[318]

While staff of nearby newspapers were horrified by Andrew Kehoe's actions, the pain experienced did not result in editorial silence. While they discussed Kehoe to a significant level, when they did so, the descriptions reflected the raw pain and intense shock resulting from one of their own committing such an atrocity. Kehoe coverage was common, but he was often framed in extreme or even evil terminology. The frames ranged from Kehoe being a predator who "caused death and destruction to stalk through the peaceful rural scenes" to the "demon slayer of small

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[314] Ibid.
[315] Daney, "Killer's Skull to be Studied," 1.
[316] "Kehoe Knew Few as Friend," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.
[317] W.A.M., "Tragedy," 1.
[318] Daney, "Killer's Skull to be Studied," 1.

children."[319] The *Ingham County News* called him "an atrocious killer of incomparable capacity, a fiend incarnate and possessed not of a thousand devils, but of tens of thousands."[320]

From a practical standpoint, newspapers at the time did not know how to define Kehoe's crime. While today we have become all too familiar with "suicide bombers" and "school shooters," in 1927, Kehoe's crime was among the first of its kind in America. *The Lansing State Journal* stated that because Kehoe's crime was so unique to modern times, "no descriptive word has as yet been evolved which would indicate the character and quality of the act, if a similar one is ever perpetrated."[321] A member of the *State Journal* staff decided then to coin the verb "kehoe" to cover the situation. The word could be used as follows: "any person who destroys another or others by explosives can be termed a 'kehoe,' the act committed would be a 'kehoe,' while the victim would be considered as having been 'kehoed.'"[322]

Journalist Lawrence Towe of *The Lansing Capital News* reported that Kehoe belonged in a criminal class all his own, stating that, "Ordinary men of this type go out and club one or two or even a dozen persons to death. One death at a time satisfies their blood-hunger. Kehoe killed nearly a half hundred. Only the fact that the current was off prevented that figure from being five times as large."[323] He went on to say that Kehoe lacked the very sentiments of humanity, those usually taken for granted as universal qualities. Noting that wreckers of trains, bombers of office buildings (such as the 1910 dynamiting of *The Los Angeles Times* headquarters), and even gang members may indeed cause more deaths than that at Bath, "These men do not calmly, scientifically, plan to murder

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[319] "Frantic Mothers Search Line at Morgue for Own Children," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2; "Horror of Kehoe's Action Grows as Public Contemplates Results," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[320] "Diabolical, not Maniacal," 1.
[321] "Bath Crime Suggests New Noun, New Verb," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 25, 1927, 21.
[322] Ibid.
[323] "Horror of Kehoe's Action Grows as Public Contemplates Results," 1.

250 innocent children as they near the end of their school year. That one point alone sets Kehoe off as a killer with unparalleled heartlessness."[324]

In describing Kehoe's perceived differences from other people, he is set apart from the rest; he becomes what Jack Lule deems an "other." In news, myths of the "other" create dramatic contrast that can affirm a community's culture, position, or place. These contrasts, Lule says, are a clear line drawn between our way of life and that of the "other's."[325] In some press, Kehoe was marked as a primitive monster emerging from the wetlands. In other media, he became a demonic predator patiently and cunningly stalking his prey. Both portrayals set Kehoe apart as a dark and formidable foe hailing from another world set far apart from the rest of humanity.

In presenting Kehoe as an evil super-criminal, his role as villain in this tragedy is solidified, and coverage of him then does not serve to glorify the killer. It instead presents Bath as being collectively victimized. As Lule points out, news stories can sometimes serve the same functions as myths – as archetypal stories that play out crucial social roles. News in this case told a story which offered an exemplary model, a way for society to express its prevailing ideals and values. The coverage provided a clear example of good and evil, of right and wrong, and of bravery and cowardice. Journalism can help people engage with and understand the complex sorrows of human life and human death.[326] Narratives about death and disaster can benefit society by making it collectively stronger. They can also present an opportunity to assess shared values such as willingness to help others in their time of need and faith and fortitude in the face of tragedy.[327]

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[324] Ibid.
[325] Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 24-25.
[326] Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 15.
[327] Kitch and Hume, 150.

Two days after the Bath bombings, on May 20, 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off in his *Spirit of Saint Louis* airplane from Roosevelt Field near the city of New York a little before 8 am EST. He arrived at Le Bourget Field near Paris at 5:21 pm EST on May 21, completing his solo journey in 33 and ½ hours. Upon landing, he instantly became the most famous person in America, and essentially across the globe.[328] The Bath tragedy began to share newspaper headlines with Lindbergh's heroic flight – quite an uneasy juxtaposition of both the grandeur and the horror of what a single, determined man can accomplish when he sets his sight on a goal.

The front pages of the nation's major newspapers on Thursday, May 19, 1927, heavily portrayed the Bath story. On Friday, May 20, with exuberant enthusiasm and fanfare, radio and newspapers exclaimed Lindbergh's departure into the mysterious unknown. On Saturday morning, May 21, newspapers' attention turned back to Bath as residents began the heart-breaking process of burying so many children in one agonizing weekend. On Sunday, Americans' attention was diverted back to Lindbergh who had safely landed near Paris, landing to a hero's grand welcome with more than 25,000 French citizens cheering him on.[329] The manic flip-flop continued but at a fizzling pace. The front pages of Monday's newspapers (mainly though of those closest to Bath) were filled again with stories of the third and final day of burials.[330] Later in the week, most national newspapers stopped discussing the Bath disaster altogether. In the six-week period following May 19, *The New York Times*, on every day but two, featured a lead story involving aviation. The wider world had become consumed with Lindbergh's heroic flight.[331]

This was a tale of two acts occurring in the same week – one admirable and laudable, the other horrific and deplorable. It was also a tale of two men, one celebrated in the grandest way

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[328] Shindo, 2.
[329] Charlie Cain, "The Day the Children Died," *City Limits*, May 1995, 33-35.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Bill Bryson, *One Summer: America, 1927* (New York: First Anchor Books, 2014), 85.

imaginable, becoming an eternal icon of American progress and superiority, the other demonized and then collectively forgotten. For a few weeks in the late spring of 1927, these two men shared the spotlight of the press's publicity machine. One was destined to become a shining beacon of the past, the other for the doldrums of historical darkness.

TOLEDO BLADE

HOME EDITION

The Blade Is the Only Evening Newspaper in Toledo Receiving the Associated Press News Dispatches

Vol. 78—No. 120 FORTY-FOUR PAGES TOLEDO, OHIO, FRIDAY, MAY 20, 1927 TWO CENTS

FUNERALS FOR 44 KILLED IN SCHOOL BLAST ARRANGED

Group Burial Plan Abandoned to Relieve Grief of Village Stricken by Explosion.

Girls Thought 'King' Ben Was Jesus' Brother

Libbey Bequests Increase Debits

Visa Denied Soviet

May Wed American

TOLEDOAN SHOT IN CLEVELAND

Wounded During Brawl in Night Club After Girl Is Insulted.

Drinks Own Wine; Loses Soviet Job

MAYOR MOVE FOR GUITTEAU UPSETS RACE

Mery Silent on Plans as Director's Friends Toss Hat Into Ring.

KEY IN POSSESSION OF ORGANIZATION

Support of Machine to Decide Attitude of Candidates for Office.

LINDBERGH PLANE HOPS OFF ON NON-STOP PARIS FLIGHT

"LONE WOLF" HOPS OFF

CAPTAIN LINDBERGH

LONE FLIER STARTS PERILOUS JOURNEY; MIST COVERS FIELD

"Flying Fool" Near Death 4 Times During Takeoff; Hopes to "Get Break" at Newfoundland.

Figure 20: The front page of *The Toledo Blade* on May 20, 1927.

CHAPTER 4:

THE AFTERMATH: RESILIENCE, RECOVERY, AND VOYEURISM

"Probably never in local history has a neighbor's plight so affected Lansing's very soul."[332]
The Lansing State Journal, May 19, 1927.

Similar to other communities that have been ravaged by disaster, the Bath School bombing became central to the township's identity. It brought with it a whole new set of social relationships, dealt a devastating blow to the fabric of the tight-knit community, and would for decades define what area residents envisioned when hearing "Bath, Michigan." But, there was also a "spiritual kinship" in Bath and the surrounding areas after the north wing of the school crumbled – trauma serving as a source of communality, as Erikson said, "a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection were deadened and the ability to care numbed."[333] Citizens of Bath assisted each other to the best of their ability, and heartfelt support poured into the township from far and near. The warmth with which Bath's neighbors responded served to reassure victims that there was still reason for hope within the devastation.[334]

As for the neighborly newspapers, they reacted differently than those more distant, both in how much press the Bath disaster obtained, and also in the manner in which the story was covered. As discussed in Chapter 1, research on media coverage of modern school shootings revealed that a media source's location influences how it frames a tragedy. Compared to regional and national

[332] "Bath Disaster brings Sentiment for Hospital Aid, Death Penalty," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[333] Erikson, 231-232.
[334] Erikson, 235.

publications, newspapers in the vicinity of Bath (the *Ingham County News*, *The Lansing State Journal*, *The Clinton County Republican News*, and the *Lansing Capital News*) presented a dominant tragic frame. These newspapers featured emotion-laden editorials. Their feature articles focused on victims and reflected details not present within the more distant newspapers – details that effectively emitted the deep trauma experienced by every member of the small township. In addition, they dedicated much newspaper space to topics which build community solidarity, such as fundraising, group relief work, and frames which depict Bath as collectively victimized. As discussed previously, heavy emphasis on the positive themes of heroes and miracles also further boosted solidarity.

While national publications displayed articles with aspects of both the tragic frame and the offender or shooter frame, it is difficult to generalize from these findings because the level of disaster coverage from these newspapers was so minimal. In the four days following the blasts, *The New York Times* and *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* ran four articles each, *The Washington Post* three, and *The Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Evening Post*, each only two. A search of some of the most popular magazines of the time – *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Outlook*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Collier's* – turned up no coverage of Bath in either May or June of 1927. *Time* even ran a brief story on May 23, 1927, that involved dynamite – that of a package filled with a pound of powdered explosive sent to the governor of Massachusetts.[335] There was, however, no mention of arguably the deadliest use of dynamite in that era.

Several newspapers reported on the modern transportation methods utilized by reporters and other staff in order to get the Bath disaster story. *The Toledo Blade* touted "Airplane and Automobile used by *Blade* to Cover School Blast."[336] Chicago's *Herald and Examiner* headlined "Blast Photos Rushed by Air for *Herald-Examiner* 'Scoop.'"[337] *The Lansing State Journal* further extended this

[335] "Radicals: Dynamite," *Time*, May 23, 1927, vol. IX, no. 21.
[336] "Airplane and Automobile used by Blade to Cover School Blast," *The Toledo Blade*, May 19, 1927, 2.
[337] "Blast Photos Rushed by Air for Herald-Examiner 'Scoop,'" *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, May 19, 1927, 1.

story locally by reporting "Chicago Paper Sends Plane for Pictures," noting that this marked the national significance of the disaster.[338] The *New York Evening Post* printed one photograph on its front page, showing the front of the school with the north end collapsed, titling the image "Where 43 Died in Mid-West Explosion." It noted, "This remarkable photograph was speeded from the scene of the disaster by airplane to Chicago."[339]

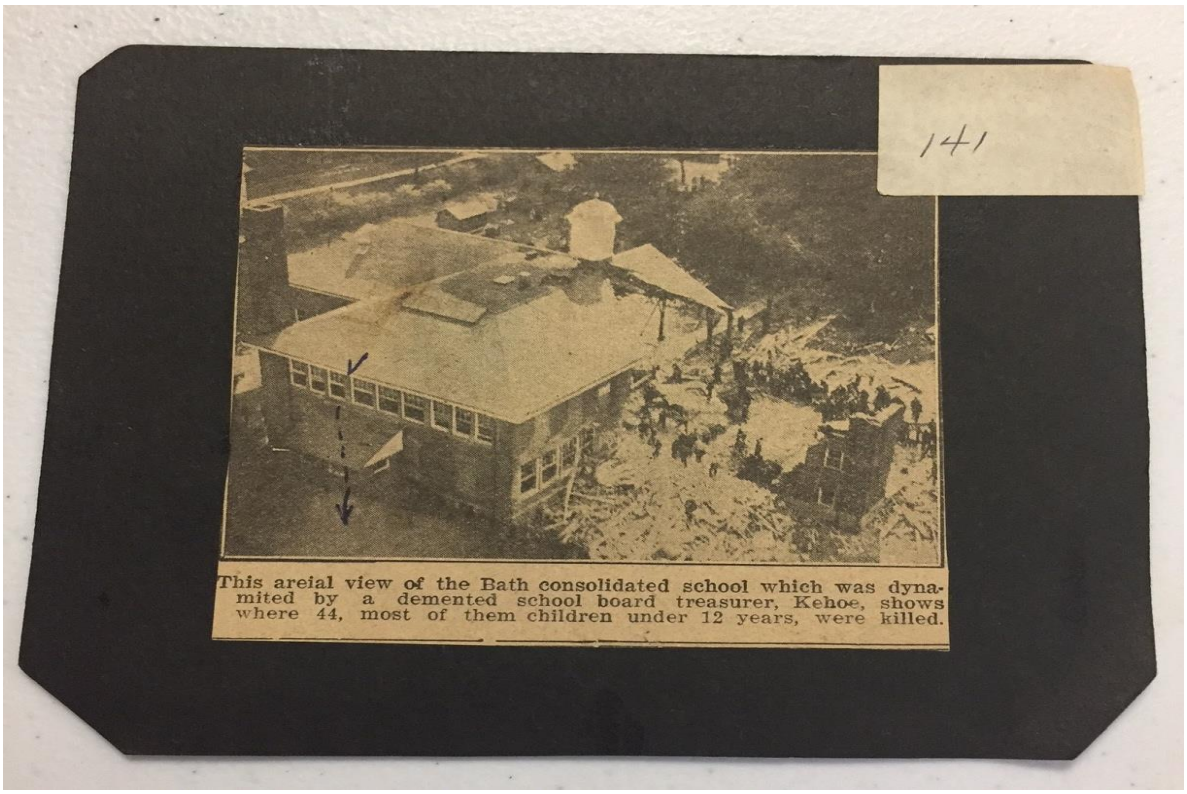

Figure 21: Photograph taken from an airplane on May 18, 1927. The arrow shows the escape window used by high school students. Newspaper clipping courtesy of the Bath School Museum. *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927.

Two of these accounts of acquiring the story reported adventurous tales. The *Chicago Herald and Examiner* had photographs published within nine hours of the blasts, stating that it believed this to be a record for original news picture transmittal. Receiving news of the disaster at

[338] "Chicago Paper Sends Plane for Pictures," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[339] "Where 43 Died in Mid-West Explosion," *New York Evening Post*, May 19, 1927, 1.

12:30 pm via telegraph, newspaper staff then sent a message to star stunt pilot Billy Brock who immediately took to the air for Lansing. He landed there at 3:45 pm, and was back in the air toward Chicago by 4:15 pm with photographic plates in hand. He landed at the airfield at 6:15 pm, where *Herald and Examiner* staff were waiting to rush them back to the *Herald* by car.[340]

Similarly, *The Toledo Blade* immediately chartered an airplane upon hearing the news, placing a staff cameraman on the plane. At the same time, they sent an automobile with reporters to Bath, a trip of about 130 miles. The chartered airplane began to have engine trouble and was forced to make an emergency landing near Jackson, Michigan. *The Blade* reported that the photographer and the pilot narrowly escaped death, or at least serious injury, as they were forced to land in a random field. The cameraman, Norman Hauger, quickly left the troubled plane, flagged down a passing motorist and hitched a ride to Jackson, where he then hired a taxi to Bath. After taking photographs there, he was then able to take a train back to Toledo Wednesday evening, therefore managing to use plane, train, and automobile in his quest to acquire evidence of the disaster.[341]

Noting it as an example of how modern air transportation had the potential to speed up commerce, *The Lansing State Journal* covered how airplanes carried film of the Bath disaster to New York and Chicago movie theaters. After this footage was dropped off in Chicago by plane, it was then air-mailed to New York, making it possible for the film to be seen in both Chicago and New York theaters by Thursday evening, May 19. In fact, there were many airplanes flying over Bath on May 18 and May 19. Representatives of newspapers from many large U.S. cities were present, and many of them utilized airplanes.[342] It was reported that approximately 24 newspaper photographers

[340] "Blast Photos Rushed by Air for Herald-Examiner 'Scoop,'" 1.
[341] "Airplane and Automobile used by Blade to Cover School Blast," 2.
[342] "Planes Carry Blast Films to Eastern Movie Houses," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 28.

from all across the country were hurrying around the school ruins, shooting views of the wreckage and ongoing rescue work.[343]

The Tourists

Evidence of nearby publications' trend toward a tragic frame can be found in their presentation of the thousands of so-called tourists who flocked to Bath in the days following the disaster. While national newspapers mentioned the extensive onslaught of people and automobiles, they did not in detail communicate the impact this had on grieving Bath residents in the same way that nearby newspapers did, and, to a lesser extent, regional newspapers as well.

Thousands of visitors crowded the small streets of Bath on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday following the disaster. These were the days of the funerals, and all available state and county police were summoned for traffic management.[344] One traffic check point on Sunday conducted by the Michigan state police showed 2,760 cars passing that point in just two hours. Another point at a main corner in Bath showed 173 vehicles passing in just fifteen minutes.[345] While a small percentage of these visitors were relatives and friends coming to Bath for funerals, the vast majority were simply the curious, or the morbid, as some newspapers called them.[346] More than 80,000 were estimated by authorities to have visited the small township that weekend.[347]

As Frank Pritchard of *The Lansing State Journal* pointed out, this was not the decent privacy that Bath would have wished to have as they buried and mourned their children. There were so many

[343] "Press Room Set Up in Tiny Woodshed," *The Lansing State Journal,* May 19, 1927.
[344] Margrete Daney, "Funeral Dirges Sound as Echo of Maniac's Revenge," *The Toledo Blade*, May 21, 1927,1.
[345] Frank Pritchard, "Valley of Tears made Mecca of Curious during Funerals," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 1.
[346] Frank Pritchard, "Crowds, Mourning or Morbid, Still Pouring into Village," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.

[347] Pritchard, "Valley of Tears made Mecca of Curious during Funerals," 1.

vehicles that ironically all were indeed driving even slower than a funeral's pace. Pritchard described the scene:

> It was as though the whole state had gotten into its automobiles to follow in the path trod to the grave by Bath, burying its dead. The noise of traffic and falling feet seemed to drown out the tired voice of Bath. Prayers were blasted by the roar of motors; the perfume of flowers was overpowered and banished by the smell of burning gasoline. An atmosphere redolent of offerings and laden with sorrow was soon made pregnant with significance by the advance of the multitudes who came not to pray, nor to weep, but to see.[348]

Bath had, in its misery, become a forced host to so many with a desire to hear and see, but who offered little help or comfort.[349] The tourists came from all walks of life – flappers, factory workers, shop girls, businessmen, and quiet wives who could not help but ponder how easily and by what slim twist of fate this could have been their own children.[350] Any children seen out during that weekend were not the local children of Bath, as the ones who were not killed or injured themselves were indoors mourning with their families. They were the children of tourists, many of whom treated Bath as an interesting diversion to the normal Sunday drive. Reporter Frank Morris of the *Detroit Free Press* stated that the visitors would not have crowded about the wrecked building and stared if "they could have seen 37 pairs of small feet protruding from blankets on the school house lawn or heard the wails of the dying. No, they would run from the scene and try to escape its memory."[351]

Instead of fleeing, however, the tourists spread blankets for picnics, lunched, and pointed out the "very spot" where Kehoe exploded the dynamite in his truck. They drank soda, ate hot dogs, and sweated in the sun, while combing the school grounds for souvenirs to take home. Some even criticized the police who were called in to manage the massive crowds of people and automobiles.

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[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid.
[350] "Children's Hour is Ghastly in Bath Village," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[351] Frank Morris, "Bath Buries its Last Dead," *Detroit Free Press*, May 23, 1927, 9.

"These country cops don't know how to handle traffic," one said.[352] *The Lansing Capital News* said the sensation-seekers "gathered like flies about the shattered remnants of what had been Andrew Kehoe" on the evening of the disaster.[353]

The tourists sat and watched workmen sift through the wreckage and often got in their way, only shrinking back a respectable distance upon hearing there was still an unknown amount of dynamite in the school. They attempted too to enter the temporary morgue set up in the town hall; only a policeman prevented them from rushing in to view the deceased. Outside of the town hall, they blocked the entrance and the sidewalk. In a heart-wrenching observation, *The Lansing Capital News* described this mass of tourists outside as "talking in low tones or staring in through the doorway or the windows at the sight of a sobbing mother holding the hand of her dead boy, her tears washing the plaster dust from the bruised flesh."[354] Services were held on Sunday for the family hit hardest by the tragedy – the triple funeral for the children of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Hart. It was held at the Hart home, with hundreds of curious tourists lining the sidewalk outside of the house. A continuously moving line of automobiles also slowly rolled by. At times, the noise outside drowned out the voice of Reverend Ledford.[355]

Morris of the *Detroit Free Press* said that the great American public claimed Bath as its curio that weekend. After witnessing tourists' behavior, he also questioned their motivation in donating to the Red Cross prior to departing Bath. "Was this mob really touched to pity?" he wondered. "Or is this the American tradition that anything worth seeing is worth paying to see?" Despite the crowd chaos surrounding them, many Bath citizens, though heavy with grief, remained cordial and respectful to visiting tourists, according to nearby press. One tourist stopped at a farmhouse to ask

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[352] Ibid.
[353] "Bath: Morbid Crowds There," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.

[354] Ibid.
[355] Pritchard, "Valley of Tears made Mecca of Curious during Funerals," 1.

the way to the cemetery. The resident pointed him in the right direction, and, kindly, but with tear-filled eyes, responded, "Just down this road a way. That's where I'm burying my two children tomorrow."[356]

By Friday morning, 48 hours since tragedy struck, tourists had forged a path several feet wide through a field of clover leading from the spot where Kehoe blew up his automobile to the spot about 100 feet away where parts of Kehoe's body were found.[357] They eagerly asked witnesses (who had seen what remained of Kehoe's body before it was taken away) to describe "just what it looked like."[358] In fact, the public desire for the macabre was seen in many instances, but none quite so poignant as in the photograph and postcard sales in local shops.

Within 24 hours of the blasts, photographs taken by Lansing photographers of various scenes of the disaster were being sold in both Bath and Lansing stores. Many of these photographs were made into postcards and sold as such. The most popular photo sold was one of nurses, uniformed in white, working on what was deemed "Hospital Hill" following the explosion. Small, huddled forms are plainly seen in the foreground. The second most popular images were those of the wrecked building itself, some with crowds of sightseers and workmen bustling about. Next were the ambulance scenes – showing the sheet-draped stretchers being pushed into the waiting cars. Rounding out the top five of the most purchased photographs involved Kehoe, one showing the burned ruins of Kehoe's car and exhibiting portions of his body still hanging from the steering wheel, and the other a photograph of his handcrafted "Criminals are Made, Not Born" sign.[359] Another postcard showed the remains of Kehoe's horses amongst other farm debris. Tourists can be seen walking the ruins of the farm.

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[356] Daney, "Funeral Dirges Sound as Echo of Maniac's Revenge," 1.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Pritchard, "Crowds, Mourning or Morbid, Still Pouring into Village," 1.
[359] "Public Taste Shown in Demand for Pictures of School Disaster," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 20, 1927, 2.

Figure 22: Photograph showing nurses assisting the dead and injured. Photos such as these were among the most popular sold at Bath and Lansing stores following the disaster. Photo courtesy of the Bath School Museum. Photo credit: Van Horn Studios of Owosso, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Figure 23: Postcard showing a portion of the destruction on Kehoe's farm. The remains of Kehoe's horses are pictured here. Photo credit: L. Waldron of Grand Ledge, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Figure 24: A photograph showing the remains of Kehoe's truck after he detonated dynamite in the rear seat, killing himself and four others. This image was one of the most popular sold in Bath and Lansing stores following the disaster. It could be purchased as a postcard or a photograph. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith. Photo credit: R.C. Leavenworth of Lansing, Michigan, May 18, 1927.

Thursday morning brought with it the discovery of Mrs. Kehoe's charred remains, and another infamous image was born – that of the blanketed cart which covered her remains. A large crowd surrounded the cart. Seconds after this photograph was shot, a woman hurried up to the reporter who had accompanied the photographer and asked quietly but excitedly, "Do you know him? Will he have pictures for sale? What's his name? I want one of those."[360] In addition to

[360] Ibid.

photography, the motion picture film taken at the scene Wednesday was shown at the Strand movie theater in Lansing on Thursday evening.[361]

Figure 25: Photograph showing the location in which Nellie Kehoe's body was found, a coat draped over the hog crate. This photograph was popular with tourists who purchased souvenir images in Bath and Lansing stores. Photo courtesy of the Bath School Museum.

While the chaos of the sensation-seeking tourists was what Bath most directly experienced during that first week, outside of that shell, for many hundreds of miles, authentic human sympathy poured out for the township. *The Lansing State Journal* sought to ensure that mourners in Bath knew of this sincere support, despite the actions of the ruthless tourists – "those with calloused feelings who have rushed in, rough shod, and have invaded the right of privacy of the sufferers."[362] The newspaper stated:

> Though it may seem that the little town of Bath was engulfed for a time by those more curious than feeling, still the people of Bath may know that, outnumbering those who

[361] Ibid.
[362] "Human Sympathy," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 26, 1927, 4.

> actually descended upon them merely to look, there were literally millions who deeply, silently sympathized. Expressions of the deepest feeling of mingled horror and sympathy were actually spoken by people who read the unthinkable story hundreds of miles from Lansing.[363]
>
> The article concluded simply, "Human kindness, human sympathy, still live."[364]

Nearby newspapers portrayed what it must have felt like to have more than 80,000 automobiles, each carrying an unknown number of individuals per car, descend upon a small farming town with an approximate population of only 300. This would be challenging under any circumstance, but encountering this situation while processing the intense trauma of losing one third of Bath's children to mass murder seems almost unbearable. Without nearby and regional newspapers portraying in detail the actions of the tourists, their attitudes, and the practical effects of the pollution and overcrowding, readers of the time would not have been able to fully empathize with the plight of Bath. After all, as Pritchard of *The Lansing State Journal* pointed out, even with the eventual departure of the tourists, "Their place will be taken by other invaders of peace and sanctity – memories, terrible memories, to which Bath will be once again the unwilling host."[365]

Media coverage of the tourists presented Bath as violated and collectively victimized twice – once by Andrew Kehoe, and the second time immediately afterward by the American public, a public whose desire to view the horror outweighed concern for the numb and shattered parents, friends, and relatives of those taken too soon. This aspect of the tragic frame that newspapers presented served to further build community solidarity within the township.

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[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Pritchard, "Valley of Tears made Mecca of Curious during Funerals," 1.

The Victims

Nearby newspapers also reported heavily on the many victims affected by the tragedy. In addition to simply having more victim-focused articles than national or regional publications, they reported details that reflected the raw and widespread pain of such an atrocity. These stories showed the varied effects that something like this has on a community's everyday existence. Perhaps this is not surprising when one considers that nearby media were victims themselves. Being such a small township with a school that drew its students not only from Bath but from the surrounding communities as well, almost all area residents lost a family member or friend that day. Newspaper staff were no exception.

Eleven-year-old Earl Ewing, who was a paper boy for *The Lansing Capital News,* was killed in the explosion.[366] He was one of the first bodies to be positively identified. Ray Forrest, circulation manager, said Earl was one of the newspaper's best carriers – "a clean-cut, bright-eyed little fellow, always prompt in his deliveries and courteous to customers."[367] The son of LaVere Harte, *Lansing State Journal* reporter, was also killed in the blasts. Robert Harte was nine years old. The newspaper called it the hardest news story that Harte ever telephoned into the news office, as he called in the funeral arrangements of his own son. The officiating minister at the Harte funeral, Rev. McDonald, had full empathy for the loss, as his own daughter, Thelma, also died that day.[368]

In an emotional show of support, Elsie Marlowe, a feature journalist for the *San Francisco Call*, drafted a letter to Bath, titling it "Into the Dawn: A Message to the Stricken Fathers and Mothers in Bath, Michigan." Marlowe lost a child of her own and was trying to offer Bath hope from someone "a year ahead on the dark trail – a year wiser in the terrible school of heartbreak." "I

[366] "Children are to be Buried from Homes," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[367] "Capital News Carrier is Killed by Blast," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 2.
[368] "Correspondent Phones of Own Son's Funeral," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 13.

am telling you this," she said. "The light will come."[369] *The Lansing Capital News* was so touched by her letter that the newspaper featured it prominently in its entirety on the front page of the May 27 edition. Her letter began by saying that she wanted to come to Bath, "as the whole world wants to come, quietly – pityingly – into your darkened room. I want to touch your hand, and somehow, without many words, make you feel the love that flows from my heart to yours."[370]

On May 27, nine days after the disaster, *The Lansing State Journal* reported that Bath's name had almost been obliterated from the nation's major newspapers. But, the reverberations of the blasts still echoed intensely through the halls of Lansing's hospitals, where 29 survivors lay in the initial phase of rather lengthy recoveries. The children's injuries included concussions, fractured limbs, facial lacerations, scalp wounds, and more minor cuts. Two young patients suffered the loss of one eye. One had her leg amputated below the knee, and another had a back injury so severe that doctors said it might disable her for life. One boy lost a finger. Despite their injuries, nurses at both Lansing hospitals reported that their young patients were remarkably cheerful and well-behaved.[371] The oldest brother to the three Hart children killed, Perry Hart, 17, had a piece of steel embedded in his ankle, a result of Kehoe's truck explosion. After surgery, he developed osteomyelitis, a serious bone infection. Iodoform gauze dressings had to be changed three times daily, as he recovered from the painful procedure. Despite being in tremendous pain and grief, Perry passed the time by playing his harmonica – cheering up ward patients, nurses, and himself in the process.[372]

The Lansing State Journal reporters detailed the condition of each patient they visited. Ranging in ages from 9 to 12, those visited included Donald Huffman, Pauline Johns, Ida De Lau,

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[369] Elsie Marlowe, "Into the Dawn," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 27, 1927, 1.
[370] Ibid.
[371] "Reverberations of Bath Blast Still Echo in Quiet Hospital Rooms Here," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 27, 1927, 13.
[372] Eleanor Clapp Smith and Gloria Smith Bouterse, *Sparrow Tales: Memories from the Graduates, School of Nursing 1899-1961* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1987), 30, account of nurse Helen Miller Perrine.

Helen Komm, Lloyd Babcock, Beatrice Gibbs, and Josephine England. Ida De Lau suffered a serious back injury, and her left arm was partially paralyzed. Because of this, doctors ordered her to lie completely flat for six weeks. It was reported that she remained one of the happiest patients in the hospital, however. When asked how she was doing by the reporter, she smiled and said, "I am feeling fine today, sir." Down the hall from Ida lay little Josephine England. Her leg was amputated two days after the disaster. She had not realized it yet though, since her leg was covered with a pillow and the nerves were still functioning as before. She played with her dolls and sang songs to pass the time.[373]

Not all patients were faring as well. While not critical at the time of the reporters' visit, 10-year-old Beatrice Gibbs' injuries would prove to be fatal. She had multiple fractures on both arms and legs, and one of these fractures later developed an infection, causing her death on August 23, 1927.[374] The reporters also passed by the room of Donald Huffman. Donald lost one eye, part of his hearing, and also one side of his face; the plan was to restore his face as much as possible with plastic surgery. He had a severe concussion and two broken legs. Doctors reported that he was the most lacerated and bruised child pulled from the rubble, dead or alive.[375] He cried continually and suffered nightmarish hallucinations when trying to sleep at night.[376]

They also passed by the room of Mrs. Anna Perrone – the one adult still in critical condition. Part of her skull was blown off during Kehoe's truck explosion. For days, she had been hovering between life and death. The journalists decided they had seen enough, stepped back outside into the sunlight, and "wondered what strange chicanery of fate it was that mangles infants and tortures their

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[373] "Reverberations of Bath Blast Still Echo in Quiet Hospital Rooms Here," 13.

[374] Grant Parker, *Mayday: The History of a Village Holocaust* (Lansing: Liberty Press, 1980), 184.
[375] M.J. Ellsworth, *The Bath School Disaster* (Self-published, Bath: 1927), 108.
[376] "Reverberations of Bath Blast Still Echo in Quiet Hospital Rooms Here," 13.

equally defenseless elders."[377] Specific details on the conditions of the hospitalized could only be found in nearby publications.

Figure 26: Nurses assist injured children in St. Lawrence Hospital. May 24, 1927, *The Lansing State Journal*.

Nearby newspapers not only reported on those killed or hospitalized but also on those who might have escaped the blasts without serious physical injury but who still suffered mental and emotional anguish. *The Lansing State Journal* reported on two boys, Gareth Harte and Ivan Seely, who successfully escaped the wreckage. By Thursday, the day after the disaster, the trauma began to show its effects. Gareth's brother, Stanley, died in the explosion. Gareth was continually weeping in

[377] "Reverberations of Bath Blast Still Echo in Quiet Hospital Rooms Here," 13.

his home and refusing to eat, rejecting any attempts at comfort by his parents. Ivan fainted on Thursday and had to be taken to the hospital.[378] Some children were not mature enough to understand the full implications of what happened. Billy Hall, the 6-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. George Hall, did not fully grasp the tragedy. He lost his two older siblings, George and Willa. *The State Journal* reported that he told his uncle, "Now I can have George's overalls and tricycle, because he ain't coming home anymore. My mother told me he wasn't."[379]

Weeks later, when national and regional publications had long stopped reporting on the disaster, nearby newspapers continued to update their readers on Bath's struggles. *The Clinton County Republican News* reported that by mid-June the Red Cross was still opening daily for children to come in and have wounds cleaned and redressed. A social worker was sent to Bath from Detroit to conduct grief counseling in the homes of many; the terrible shock and immense ongoing grief had overwhelmed many families. Several of the surviving children by this time had begun to show signs of mental disorder and stress. The newspaper reported that counselors said it would be months before these children could be considered back to normal, if ever.[380] Children who were more seriously injured continued to need care even months after their hospital release. Donald Huffman needed multiple plastic surgeries over several years, and others had to return to the hospital for additional treatment on occasion.[381]

Harkening back to Jack Lule's viewpoint of journalism as socially vital myth, one important social role that news serves is helping reconcile people with the seeming randomness and fragility of human life and death. Despite even the most carefully laid plans and precautions taken, lives can be exterminated in an instant by a drunk driver, a tornado, a fire, a terrorist or a gunman. Lule said,

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[378] "Small Boys who Lost Pals Suffer Breakdowns," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.
[379] "Bath Boy Can't Grasp Loss, Happy at Gain," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 2.
[380] "Bath Children Suffer Shock," *The Clinton County Republican News*, June 9, 1927, 1.
[381] "Will Rebuild on Same Site," *The Clinton County Republican News*, June 30, 1927, 1.

"Life is lived always in the presence of death."[382] Though the names and settings change, news steadfastly tells the story of the victim – an innocent one guilty only of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.[383]

Much of the fear that people feel when they read of horrific disasters lies in the notion that the victim is a symbol of the self, the thought that it "could have been me." Because often only chance or timing creates the tragedy, myth within news stories helps establish the link between audience and victim. It says this sacrificed victim, the one who died or was injured by no fault of his or her own, could have been the reader. News then, when functioning as myth, instills a portion of the terror when events such as that at Bath occur and are covered in media.[384] But, understanding disaster and murder coverage in terms of myth brings about a wider perspective. An important social tale lies within the reporting of victims' deaths. Since logic alone will not explain their sudden demise, people need to hear and to tell the story of the victim.[385]

In discussing the murder of so many children, journalists covering the Bath tragedy in 1927 took on the role of storytellers. In focusing heavily on the victims, nearby newspapers drew from the timeless effort of attempting to reconcile people with the ultimate fate of human existence – death. As Lule stated, "In the face of chaos, order is established. In the face of death, life is affirmed. In the face of tragedy, news becomes myth."[386]

Media coverage can help victims in other ways as well. Psychiatrist Beverly Raphael discussed a positive way that the press can help victims while covering a disaster. Through giving their testimony to reporters, victims can gain "mastery" over feelings of fear, shock, and

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[382] Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 53.
[383] Ibid., 54.
[384] Ibid., 57.
[385] Ibid., 58.
[386] Ibid., 59.

helplessness.[387] Public statements can be a "vehicle for individual and group release of feeling," which can help in recovery.[388] At its most basic level, the simple act of acknowledging that victims have suffered provides "psychosocial care for disaster-affected people and communities."[389] When journalists focus on the human interest angle of a tragedy, these stories "are likely to underscore the suffering and need of the affected community. This media attention again indicates to victims that their plight is being taken seriously."[390]

In addition to reporting details of specific victims, nearby newspapers also reported on the general hysteria over dynamite that was rampant in Bath and the surrounding communities in the days after the blasts. Despite the fact that authorities had every house, building, and barn in Bath searched for dynamite, people continued to fear the presence of the explosive. Margrete Daney, a journalist for *The Toledo Blade*, upon visiting Bath, reported that people walked gingerly along the streets, carefully avoiding any stray wires, just in case they were placed there by Kehoe.[391]

The Lansing Capital News reported an incident that happened on Thursday, the day after the disaster, at the school ruins in which someone carelessly dropped two cardboard boxes in the school yard. Upon the crowd noticing them, all feared they were filled with dynamite and backed away. Soon, a bold passerby kicked the boxes, showed they were empty, and kept on walking. The crowd once again filled in the space occupied by the boxes.[392] The hysteria stretched into Lansing as well, causing "jumpy-nerved Lansingites to see suspicious signs of new dynamite plots on every hand."[393] Police officers in Lansing had some real reason for caution on Friday morning, as a Bath resident

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[387] Beverly Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes: How Individuals and Communities Cope with Catastrophe* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 94.
[388] Ibid., 95.
[389] Ibid., 245.
[390] Ibid., 246.
[391] Daney, "Funeral Dirges Sound as Echo of Maniac's Revenge," 1.
[392] "Dynamite Scare is Touched by Humor," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[393] "All Watching for Dynamite," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 20, 1927, 1.

brought to them a fused-glass wired contraption that his young son had found at the Kehoe farm. He thought it might contain nitroglycerine, but analysis found it to be only quick-silver, which was not, in and of itself, explosive.[394]

The Clinton County Republican News reported that several residents of Saint Johns, about 19 miles from Bath, heard a loud, explosion-like sound on Saturday night. The sound came from the southeast so some feared there had been another blast in Bath. Newspapers conjectured that what they heard was an earthquake.[395] The sound had not come from Bath. Perhaps in an effort to relieve some of this anxiety over explosives, the American Railway Association held a lecture nine days after the disaster; the topic was how to properly handle volatile dynamite. A representative from the explosives department of the ARA also discussed the effects of the dynamite set off by Kehoe.[396] This aspect of the locals generally being "on edge" was not covered by the more distant newspapers.

Humans were not the only ones affected negatively by the disaster. *The Lansing State Journal* reported that domestic animals for miles around the scene suffered in various ways. One local farmer told the newspaper that two of his hogs were made totally deaf. Another was driving a team of horses at the time of the explosion. The horses became completely unmanageable upon the sound of the blast and were not able to be worked on the farm since then. In addition, many family dogs took off running from their homes upon hearing the booming sound. In the days following, some started to return. Occasionally, a scared and trembling canine was seen in the streets of Bath, slinking its way toward home.[397]

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[394] Ibid.
[395] "Hear Strange Sound like an Explosion on Saturday Night," *The Clinton County Republican News*, May 26, 1927.
[396] "Lecture on Explosives to be given Friday," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 25, 1927, 11.
[397] "Blast Deafened Hogs, Scared Dogs, Horses," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 2.

In addition to thorough reporting on the various victims of the disaster, nearby newspapers were adept at covering details of the tragedy – particulars that effectively emitted the raw pain of the tragedy. These details stir empathy in the reader and further emphasize a tragic frame. *The Lansing Capital News* ran a story on its front page which described the scene Wednesday evening, after all bodies had been removed and rescue work had ceased for the time being. For the moment, crowds were not swarming. The story was simple yet plaintive. It read:

> Playthings and books lay scattered around the grounds at the Bath school Wednesday as darkness came, and no small owners arrived to claim them. Out under a tree lay a doll tossed there by one workman. Nearer the ruin lay a homemade baseball bat. On a section of flooring left intact by the explosion lay a pile of books. On the fly leaf of one was written: Forest Robert Cochran, "Bobby," 3rd grade. "Bobby's" name already was included in the growing list of those who would not need school books anymore.[398]


RAGGEDY ANN SURVIVES, LITTLE MOTHER DIES

This Raggedy Ann doll, found in the school wreckage, brought sad memories to one Bath home. Raggedy Ann was paying her first visit to school, chaperoned by a kindergarten child who had begged her parents' permission to take Raggedy Ann to school. Searchers found Raggedy Ann near the body of the little kindergartner.

Figure 27: This photograph was published on May 19, 1927, the day after the disaster. The caption reads, "This Raggedy Ann doll, found in the school wreckage, brought sad memories to one Bath home. Raggedy Ann was paying her first visit to school, chaperoned by a kindergarten child who had begged her parents' permission to take Raggedy Ann to school. Searchers found Raggedy Ann near the body of the little kindergartener." *The Toledo Blade*, May 19, 1927, 2.

[398] "Books, Toys Found on School Grounds," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.

The Lansing State Journal, in covering the funerals, mentioned that Thelma McDonald's classmates picked wild flowers on the morning of her funeral and strew them around the home of her grief-stricken parents. The newspaper also told the tale of Mr. and Mrs. James Medcoff, who were unable to account for their son, Emerson, all day Wednesday. They held out hope that he had escaped and would make his way home. "We expected him to come home, right up to the last, but about 6 o'clock, a neighbor came in to say Emerson had been found under a blanket."[399] In a short article on May 19, the newspaper also reported that the decision had been made by Floyd Huggett, Bath school principal, to cancel the graduation ceremony and simply hand diplomas to Bath school seniors. Huggett felt that any ceremony would just add to the sorrow felt by mothers and fathers whose children would never enter the school again.[400] Newspapers closest to the disaster highlighted details such as these.

Fundraising and Relief Work

One way of fostering solidarity and healing is to report the efforts being made to help the situation. Fundraising and local collective relief work was featured heavily by nearby newspapers. John Haarer, chairman of the committee in charge of the Bath relief fund, said that the sympathetic manner in which neighboring towns were rallying to the aid of Bath was impressive. *The Lansing State Journal* reported that it reminded one of "the old pioneering days when calamity rallied every neighbor to the aid of a family."[401] The newspaper stated, "Probably never in local history has a neighbor's plight so affected Lansing's very soul."[402] In a letter to Lansing, Bath thanked its neighbor for the vital assistance, stating, "May God bless your people and reward you abundantly

[399] Ted Christie, "Funeral Series Occupies Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[400] "To Hand Diplomas to Bath School Seniors," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 21.
[401] "Over $7,300 in Bath Aid Fund," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 26, 1927, 1.
[402] "Bath Disaster brings Sentiment for Hospital Aid, Death Penalty," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 1927, 1.

and may you never have to taste the bitter cup of woe and sorrow that has been forced on our people."[403]

Every community in the vicinity of the stricken township was helping in one way or another. The neighboring communities reported to be financially assisting Bath were Lansing, Ovid, St. Johns, Wayne, Dewitt, Mason, Muskegon, Alaiedon, Okemos, and Holt. The small town of Laingsburg even donated $1,000 to the relief fund – a large amount for such a tiny village.[404] Donating organizations included school districts, Michigan State University, Scottish Rite, the Fisher Body plant, and the Garber-Buick company, among others. Employees of the Fisher Body plant were especially motivated to donate, as three of their own lost children in the explosion.[405] Proceeds from movies and dance hall parties were donated to the relief fund.[406] Twenty-five percent of profit from the McGraw-Clark boxing bout in Detroit was pledged to Bath.[407] Members of St. Martha's guild held a benefit tea event.[408] A community baseball game with musical entertainment was planned with all proceeds going to Bath.[409]

Donations rolled in from a variety of sources. Inmates at a Michigan state prison in Ionia gave $200.[410] Children suffering from illness at the Ingham County Tuberculosis Sanitarium added their own coins to contributions made by employees there.[411] By May 27, the fund was close to

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[403] "Bath Township Expresses Thanks for Lansing's Aid after Disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 27, 1927, 10.
[404] "Neighbor Town Assists Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 25, 1927, 1. One thousand dollars in 1927 is the equivalent of more than $13,000 in 2017 dollars. Accessed May 12, 2017, http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=1000&year=1927.
[405] "Fisher Employees Raise Bath Fund," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 27, 1927, 1.
[406] "Mason is Raising Bath Relief Fund," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 24, 1927, 8; "Bath Fund Total Nearing $9,000," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 27, 1927, 1.
[407] "Disaster Fund Grows Hourly," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 1.
[408] "Benefit Tea to Aid Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 17.
[409] "Bath Benefit Game," *Ingham County News*, June 2, 1927.
[410] "Ionia Inmates to Give $200 for Bath Relief," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[411] "Over $7,300 in Bath Aid Fund," 1.

$9,000 – the equivalent of more than $122,000 in 2017 dollars.[412] By June 29, the fund reached $16,654.[413]

One philanthropic idea that was being given much media attention by Saturday morning was that of a possible ward at the Edward W. Sparrow Hospital in Lansing to be equipped by donations as a memorial to those children who lost their lives.[414] Dubbed the Bath Children's Memorial Fund, the effort was added as a part of the overall hospital drive, a fundraiser which was ongoing prior to the disaster.[415] Since many of the injured were brought to Sparrow Hospital, the Bath tragedy increased interest in contributing to the drive. The influx of so many patients at once highlighted the need for additional space, as every available spot in the hospital, even hallways, had been utilized by the little patients.[416]

The special fund took off immediately with $1,500 pledged as soon as it was announced.[417] Once complete, a bronze tablet was to be placed in the planned ward in memory of Bath's children.[418] It is unclear whether or not this bronze tablet was ever placed in a specifically named ward. However, it is true that the extra funds received then allowed the hospital to purchase much needed children's equipment and greatly improved the hospital's pediatric care. This marked the beginning of Sparrow Hospital's development of an outstanding pediatric unit. In this sense, the hospital stated, Bath's children did not die in vain.[419]

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[412] "Bath Fund Total Nearing $9,000," 1. Conversion accessed May 12, 2017, http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=9000&year=1927.
[413] "Allot Aid at Bath Meeting," *The Lansing State Journal*, June 29, 1927, 1.
[414] "Bath Memorial Project Takes," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 1.
[415] "Bath Memorial Fund Started," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[416] "More Funds Come in Hospital Drive," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 21, 1927, 1; "Disaster Seen Spur to Drive," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 1927, 2.
[417] "Bath Memorial Fund Started," 1.
[418] "Bath Memorial Project Takes," 1.
[419] Jean Frazier, *A Century of Caring: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital Centennial History 1896-1996* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1996), 90.

In addition to financial assistance, nearby newspapers also reported physical relief work undertaken by local residents. *The Lansing Capital News* reported that people were going house-to-house seeking sheets and pillowcases to be used for bandages for the injured children being cared for in homes and in hospitals.[420] Women of the Country Club of Lansing spent their Thursday afternoon, the day after the disaster, making bandages for this purpose.[421] To further this cause, *The Lansing State Journal* asked its readers for linen donations on its front page on May 20.[422] To prevent lockjaw, nurses visited injured children in their homes and administered tetanus shots.[423] The Red Cross, both members of the local chapter as well as the emergency team sent to Bath, visited all families affected directly by the disaster – those with children who were seriously injured and those with minor physical injuries – 61 Bath families in all.[424] By May 27, all emergency relief work was complete, and the local chapter of the Red Cross in Bath solely continued the work.[425]

Relief work and arduous cleanup continued into the summer. All debris had to be removed and anything worth saving salvaged. Women and children helped remove nails from the intact wood beams from the damaged north wing.[426] As *The Clinton County Republican News* reported on July 14, men and women from all parts of the Bath community donated their services in helping to clear away the wreckage of the school building. By mid-July, the work was speeded up and help increased by the need to get it cleared quickly in order for the new part of the building to be erected in the near future.[427]

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[420] "Children are to be Buried from Homes," 1.
[421] Nona Faris Ostrander, "Women of Country Club make Bandages to Aid in Disaster," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 16.
[422] "Need Linens for Hospital Relief," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[423] "Relief Work Going Ahead," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 19, 1927, 1.
[424] Frank Pritchard, "Red Cross Begins Rehabilitation Work," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 11; "Red Cross Ends Busy Period," *The Lansing State Journal*, July 13, 1927, 1.
[425] "Red Cross Work at Bath Finished," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 27, 1927, 1.
[426] Bernstein, 158.
[427] "People of Bath Help Clear Away School Wreckage," *The Clinton County Republican News*, July 14, 1927, 1.

With heavy coverage of local relief efforts, nearby newspapers became an important source of healing for Bath. By highlighting the community's successes in easing the suffering of fellow citizens, a sense of mutual support was fostered and community solidarity increased. By empathizing the theme of successful relief, the needs of the local audience were met – a need for healing and a sense that actions being taken were moving steadily toward this mending.

Other Social Issues

There was not an extensive diversion into other issues as is seen in modern coverage of school violence. Today, coverage can spawn public discussion of gun control, mental health care, and school security. While this did not happen in 1927 to any large extent, some newspapers did question how Kehoe obtained so much explosive. Media immediately reported that some dynamite had been stolen from a construction site nearby.[428] A week later, newspapers reported that Kehoe had travelled with fellow farmer J.P. Sleight to Jackson, Michigan, in 1925. On this trip, Kehoe purchased 500 pounds of pyrotol – an explosive readily available to farmers through county agricultural agents. Kehoe told Sleight he wanted the explosive in order to blast stumps and rocks on his farm. He would sell the rest to other farmers, he said.[429]

The Lansing State Journal interviewed Joe Wahl of the John F. Kirker Real Estate company. This firm listed the Kehoe farm for sale in January of 1927. Wahl had gotten to know Kehoe fairly well, describing him as well-educated, yet temperamental. One day that January while visiting the farm, he noticed a smaller structure set apart from the other buildings. He asked Kehoe what it contained. "Dynamite," Kehoe replied. Wahl thought nothing of it since he knew many farmers

[428] "39 Killed by Dynamite in School," *Youngstown Vindicator*, May 18, 1927, 1; "Michigan Blast Razes School," *New York Evening Post*, May 18, 1927, 1.
[429] "Kehoe Called Rifle Expert," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 24, 1927, 1; "New Building is Given by Sen. Couzens," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 20, 1927,1; "New Building to be Put up in Bath Site," *The Lansing Capital News*, May 24, 1927, 1.

used it for blasting.[430] The general consensus of the reports was that Kehoe's weapon of choice was both legally and easily obtained since farmers could readily get dynamite and pyrotol from war surplus stores for the purpose of stump blowing.[431] Despite this point being clearly made by multiple media sources, no printed discussion or debate was begun on the merits or potential ongoing danger of such a situation.

Here and there, era newspapers touched on potential issues spawning out of the disaster, yet these did not ignite sufficiently to spread to other media, and they never became a hot button issue. The *Detroit Free Press* hinted at the issue of school security when it questioned how Kehoe could have managed to install the complicated wiring needed to carry out his plan. Evidence showed that some of the unexploded dynamite found in the south wing had been there for many weeks.[432] Kehoe, therefore, managed to obtain unrestricted and unknown access to the building for at least this amount of time.

Written outcry and debate on the topics of violence, gun control, and mental illness were not unheard of in the 1920s. Within *The Literary Digest* in 1925, an editorial writer worried about the mentally ill "wandering about the country, armed and ready to commit any crime that their unbalanced mind may suggest, for apparently it is not a difficult matter, even for an escaped lunatic, to procure firearms."[433] Still, these concerns were not reflected in any significant level within media coverage after the Bath bombing.

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[430] "Tried to Sell Kehoe Farm," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 25, 1927, 5.
[431] "Bath Abandons Group Funeral," *Youngstown Vindicator*, May 20, 1927, 24; "Bath Buries 17 Victims of Mad Murderer," *Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 1927, 11; "Funerals for 44 Killed in School Blast Arranged," *The Toledo Blade*, May 20, 1927, 1; "Maniac's Wife Laid to Rest," *Erie Daily Times*, May 21, 1927, 2.

[432] Cash Asher, "Dead Total 44 as Farm Gives up Wife's Body," *Detroit Free Press*, May 20, 1927, 1.
[433] "Murderous Maniacs at Large," *The Literary Digest*, September 19, 1925, vol. 86, 9.

The Clinton County Republican News was one exception. It published an article one week after the disaster entitled "Cranks." This article indicated a fear of the mentally ill by some in the community. It cited anonymous letters that were then circulating in Clinton county, letters that were reported to contain "obscene statements mingled with quotations from the scriptures." Some of these letters had been mailed, and others were simply dropped in the streets. The article concluded, "In every community there are unbalanced minds which need only some spectacular disaster, such as occurred at Bath last week, to set their deficient minds in a turmoil. It now develops that Kehoe himself became first a crank and then a maniac. People who show indications of even mild insanity should be reported to the proper authorities before some great damage is done."[434]

Just one article posited that the Bath tragedy was due to the growing problem of modernity – a harrowing example of innocence being lost in our modern world. *The Lansing State Journal* published this article on its front page. It focused on a local pastor's opinion of the root cause of the disaster. Dr. E.W. Bishop believed it to be not God's doing, as some locals expressed, but that of the extreme human depravity of Andrew Kehoe. During the sermon, which was printed in full by the newspaper, Bishop deemed modern life hazardous. He stated:

> While the doctors are working to increase the span of life through hygiene and prophylaxis, the increasing hazards of civilization are whittling life off. The indiscriminate sale and use of firearms, the leaving of high explosive unguarded, the increasing violent depredations of the anti-social criminal group, the mixture of alcohol and gasoline on our machine-filled highways, the nervous and mental strain of our high-speed living, are all taking a mental toll.[435]

The issue of capital punishment emerged once in nearby press. Had Kehoe not committed suicide, it might have proliferated. A *Lansing State Journal* reporter found renewed sentiment

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[434] "Cranks," *The Clinton County Republican News*, May 26, 1927. In the late 1920s, people who appeared to be afflicted with a mild form of paranoia were generally termed "cranks."
[435] "Local Pastor Sees Human Depravity Alone Responsible for Bath Horror," 11.

among the community in favor of the death penalty. These people argued that, had Kehoe survived, he deserved to be killed by the "outraged commonwealth."[436]

In keeping with previous research conducted on media coverage of more recent acts of mass murder in schools, the newspapers closest to Bath published more tragedy-related articles, focused heavily on individual victim's stories, strongly emphasized community solidarity, and consistently depicted Bath as grieving and collectively victimized. The tragic frame used by newspapers at the time helped to foster social solidarity in Bath, helping the stricken community to cope. As discussed in chapter three, nearby newspapers in 1927 did not shy away from covering the killer. They did, however, firmly frame Kehoe as the evil adversary within their coverage.

Portrayal of Kehoe as evil is one reason that use of the offender frame by nearby media did not lead to communal blaming or elevate social guilt. Despite the fact that media reported some red flags in regard to Kehoe (such as an incident in which Kehoe told a school employee that his paycheck might be his last) and that Kehoe showed signs of declining mental health and attitude, guilt was not transformed to the collective community.[437] One explanation for this is the time and place in which this tragedy occurred. Bath was a small farming township in 1927; there was not a town psychiatrist to which to refer Kehoe, even if neighbors had increasingly noticed odd behavior prior to May 18. Getting Kehoe mental health care to fend off future violence was simply not a viable option. A strong and dominant tragic frame coexisting with the Kehoe coverage also helped to mitigate any negative effects focusing on the killer might bring. And, the extreme depravity of the crime against the most innocent of victims virtually eliminated any thoughts of placing blame on the

[436] "Bath Disaster brings Sentiment for Hospital Aid, Death Penalty," 1.

[437] On May 1, 1927, Kehoe handed Ward Kyes, the school bus driver, his paycheck as usual. Kyes' foot slipped off of the clutch, and he dropped the check on the bus floor. Kehoe said, "You better keep that. That may be the last you will ever get." Kyes reported that Kehoe was in an exceptionally good mood that day.
Inquest as to the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck, May 23-25, 1927. Testimony of Ward Kyes. Clinton County, Michigan, 129.

sorrowful township – a community whose existing tight-knit nature formed a stronghold against any divisive effects of media coverage from the start.

CHAPTER 5:

A FORGOTTEN DAY

"The events of that day were so shocking and incomprehensible that they seem to have been almost blotted out of collective memory in an act of self-protective amnesia. Indeed, many lifetime Michigan residents have never even heard of what happened in Bath."[438]

Jack Lessenberry, *Michigan Radio/National Public Radio Podcasts*, May 2009

The events of May 18, 1927, in the small township of Bath, Michigan, are so faintly remembered by the general American public that modern school tragedies such as the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, and at Virginia Tech in 2007, were erroneously deemed in the press at the times of their occurrences as the deadliest school massacres in U.S. history.[439] The Bath disaster is not discussed in the main history books of Michigan, and, with the exception of middle and high school class projects in Bath, it is not taught to youth in Michigan's school systems. To quote one citizen of Bath, "So many books on Michigan history, and we aren't even in the index!"[440] While Kehoe's damaged watch which he wore on the day of the bombings is housed in the archives of the Michigan History Museum in Lansing, it is not on display for the public, nor can one view any artifacts there that relate to the Bath disaster.[441] Andrew Kehoe is often left out of published lists of

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[438] Jack Lessenberry, *Essays and Interviews*, Daily on Michigan Radio, Michiganradio.org, National Public Radio Podcasts, May 2009.

[439] "Worst-ever school attack forgotten," *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1999, A18; "'27 Michigan bloodbath dwarfs even Littleton," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, May 2, 1999, J2; Lisa Hoffman, "VA Tech is not the worst in horrific history of school massacres," *Scripps Howard News Service*, April 16, 2007; "Historical Michigan school tragedy 'worst ever,'" *The Trentonian*, April 24, 2007; Theresa Vargas, "Virginia Tech was not the worst school massacre in U.S. history. This was.," *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2017.

[440] *An Act of Madness: The Bath School Bombing*, production program, written by Jane Falion and Jeffrey Nash, dir. Jane Falion, Riverwalk Theatre, Lansing, MI, August 20-22, 2009. Program courtesy of Johanna Balzer.

[441] Eric Perkins, Historian, Michigan History Museum, Michigan History Center, Lansing, Michigan; Emily Bingham, "Watch worn by school killer is preserved in state archives," *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, May 18, 2017, A1.

the nation's worst murderers.[442] In 2009, on the tenth anniversary of the Columbine school shooting, *The Dallas Morning News* called Kehoe "the worst American mass killer you never heard of."[443] On a collective level, the Bath School disaster has managed to be almost completely glossed over in the memory of the American public.

Figure 28: Kehoe's watch. It was donated to the Archives of Michigan about a month after the Bath disaster by a Bath School board member. The watch's minute hand is frozen at 12 after, which could mean that 9:12 am is the exact moment Kehoe detonated his shrapnel-filled truck. It is impossible to know, however, whether the watch's minute-hand was frozen as a result of the explosion, or if someone moved the hand at a later time. Photo courtesy of Michigan History Center. Emily Bingham, "Watch worn by school killer is preserved in state archives," *Jackson Citizen Patriot,* May 18, 2017, A1.

The event was also ignored in a sense for years after 1927 by those who survived it. Few survivors spoke of it, and if they did, discourse was limited to family members or close friends. For decades, there were no annual memorial events, no ribbons worn, and no public calls for

[442] Charlie Cain, "The day the children died," *City Limits*, May 1999, 33-35.
[443] Jacquielynn Floyd, "Columbine massacre elicits many theories, no answers," *The Dallas Morning News,* April 24, 2009, 1B.

remembrance. This changed, however, in 1975 when the James Couzens Memorial Park was put in place of the recently razed school. And, in 1977, Bath Consolidated School's 1927 high school graduates were finally able to walk across the stage and receive their diplomas. Upon invitation from Bath High School's 1977 graduating class, each graduate received a new diploma, this one signed by current superintendent James Hixson. (The graduates of 1927, though they did not have a ceremony, did receive diplomas. However, these were not signed by superintendent Emory Huyck due to his death.)[444] Of the fifteen graduates of 1927, ten were still living in 1977, and nine were able to participate.[445] Just after the ceremony, the graduates held their fiftieth high school reunion – a tradition that continues today. Each year in May, all Bath graduates who are 50 years or more past high school graduation gather together to celebrate and to remember those lost on May 18, 1927.

This chapter considers how the Bath School disaster has been remembered and memorialized in media coverage over time. As previously discussed, Charles Lindbergh's heroic transatlantic flight, occurring just 2 days later, distracted much of the country's attention. This had an undeniable effect on press coverage at the time. While withstanding longer in regional and nearby press, the Bath disaster received only two full days of significant national press coverage. This is, however, not the sole reason that the event has been so obscured by time. This chapter discusses other possible factors affecting this collective forgetting. The themes of survivor silence, lasting psychological effects, and the disaster emerging in press at times of modern school murders are used to explore collective amnesia of the bombings.

[444] "Commencement exercises held – 50 years after students graduate," *Clinton County News*, June 5, 1977.
[445] Dawn Voorheis Hawks, *A Time & Times: My Memoirs* (San Bernardino: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, 2016), 137.

Figure 29: Three floral arrangements adorn the Hart home on the 3-year anniversary of the Bath bombings, May 18, 1930. This ACME NewsPictures photo caption read: "A sad reminder of 'Madman' of Bath's rampage – Three small wreaths mark the Eugene Hart house, where a family of five children lived with their father and mother. Vivian, Iola, and Percy are dead due to the dynamiting rampage of School Treasurer Kehoe."

Survivor Silence

When the press began to mention the Bath disaster decades later, a common theme was the fact that no one had been publicly discussing it for a very long time. Johanna Cushman Balzer's parents, Fordney Cushman and Wilma Cressman Cushman, both survived the bombings. Growing up in Bath in the 1950s and 1960s, Balzer remembers seeing adults around town who showed physical scars or disfigurement. "So, you know, as a curious child, you might ask what happened to a person, why did they have this bad scar? And it was always that they'd gotten it in the Bath School disaster, so, you just didn't ask questions." Her uncle, Willis Cressman, also a survivor, added,

"Well, it wasn't a very nice thing to talk about."[446] Irene Babcock Dunham, 109 years old in 2017 and then the disaster's last living survivor, told *The Lansing State Journal* that she didn't speak at all about it until the 1970s and even then, only to family.[447]

Raymond Eschtruth began to speak of it in 1996 at age 79; he attended a commemorative program at Bath Middle School with his daughter, Susan Hagerman, and this triggered the beginning of discussions.[448] It was also at this time that Harold Burnett began to speak of the disaster to his family at age 80.[449] Harold's beloved older brother, Floyd, died in the disaster. Because it was a topic long pushed aside, Floyd Burnett, decades later, did not have a headstone. After Burnett began to discuss the disaster, it was important to him that his brother's grave be properly marked. The Burnett family dedicated Floyd's headstone soon after.[450]

It took until 1992 for Carlton Hollister to learn that it was Emory Huyck who carried him to safety. In fifth grade in 1927, Hollister was the first living but injured child to be pulled from the wreckage. When he regained consciousness, he found himself on the front porch of the telephone office about two blocks from the school. His mother was by his side. "She lived 20 years after that day, and I never asked, nor did she ever tell, how she found me," he recalled. Because his family never spoke of the disaster, it took 65 years for Hollister to mention to his older brother, Kenneth, that he had always wondered whom it was that initially rescued him. His brother informed him that

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[446] "Survivors recall 1927 Michigan school massacre," *StoryCorps: Morning edition of National Public Radio*, April 17, 2009.
[447] Rachel Greco, "Bath School bombing: Oldest surviving student recalls how 'awful' it was,'" *The Lansing State Journal*, May 14, 2017, 1.
[448] Susan Hagerman (daughter of Raymond Eschtruth), interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Bath School Disaster 90th Commemoration, Bath, Michigan, May 20, 2017.

[449] Judy Putnam, "Remembering the Bath explosion," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 17, 2017, 1.
[450] Michelle Allen (daughter of Harold Burnett), interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Bath School Disaster 90th Commemoration, Bath, Michigan, May 20, 2017.

Huyck carried him there and then instructed telephone operator Lenora Babcock to begin calling for help.[451]

Josephine Cushman Vail, whose little brother Ralph perished in the school, called the decades in which survivors did not speak of the disaster a "conspiracy of silence." "It was never mentioned. It was never brought up," she said. "It was a no-no."[452] It was so much a taboo topic that in 1975 when the memorial park was proposed to take the place of where James Couzens Agricultural School once stood, some survivors and locals opposed it.[453] Even later with the memorial park in place, the disaster remained largely dormant in the public eye. It became more illuminated with the creation of the Bath School Museum.[454] Originally housed in the all-purpose room of Bath Elementary School, the museum held its open house on November 4, 1984. Among the museum's artifacts are the flag that flew above the school that day and a chair that remained in the arms of one frightened child as he sprinted home from the exploded school.[455]

In the 1990s, Hollywood filmmakers attempted to bring the Bath story to the big screen but found little support and ultimately failed in their efforts.[456] Survivor Dean Sweet was approached many times by movie executives but refused them each time. "They'd have sex and everything else in it, and it wouldn't be anything like what happened," Sweet told a reporter in 2001. "We tell them forget it. We don't want any part of it."[457] Local historian Gene Wilkins said that locals feared that

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[451] Account of Carlton Hollister as printed in: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, *A Time & Times: My Memoirs* (San Bernardino: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, 2016), 116.
[452] Scott Dav, "Community wrestles with best way to commemorate Bath School disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 2012.
[453] Francis Donnelly, "Haunting Massacre: 80 years later, survivors in Bath still trying to forget school bombing," *The Detroit News*, April 28, 2007, 9A.
[454] Steve Harmon, "Bath revisited: Colorado tragedy reopens Bath's wounds of 1927," *The Lansing State Journal*, April 23, 1999, A1.
[455] Sheila Schimpf, "Bath's attics opening to fill museum," *The Lansing State Journal*, October 26, 1984.
[456] Charlie Cain, "The day the children died," *City Limits*, May 1999, 33-35; Jeff Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," *Detroit Free Press*, December 9, 2001, 1J.
[457] Jeff Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," *Detroit Free Press*, December 9, 2001, 1J. This article is featured in the Bath School Museum.

Hollywood would take too much license with the story and conjure feelings of anger, guilt, and remorse within the community. He added, "If they do make one, I just hope it's factual."[458] In 2004, documentarian Matt Martyn was successful in interviewing survivors, but the disaster remained a closely guarded topic. It took Martyn five months of working closely with locals to finally get an interview with a survivor. He noted that by the time people began to open up about the bombings, there were few survivors left. These few realized the event was "at risk of being forgotten by the world."[459] Arnie Bernstein, author of *Bath Massacre: America's First School Bombing*, experienced something similar when he began to interview the remaining survivors in 2007. "When I came in, it had been eight decades, and nobody had talked about it. It was just this scar on the land," he said.[460]

The survivor silence in Bath did not, however, reflect a diminished intensity of memory internally within survivors – what Michael Schudson deems distanciation. A powerful counter to the effects of distanciation lies in trauma and the various effects of post-traumatic stress disorder within survivors of violent tragedies.[461] The concept of trauma merges psychology with history and blurs any boundary between them. While the event itself is external, the trauma, the response, is internal. Cognitive systems, once firmly connected to the outside world, can collapse, and traumatized people can become disconnected from self and society. "The traumatized person," writes Cathy Caruth, "carries an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."[462]

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[458] Charlie Cain, 35.
[459] Judy Putnam, "Remembering the Bath explosion," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 7, 2017, 1.
[460] Scott Bomboy, "Huge school bombing in 1927 puts Sandy Hook in context," *Yahoo News*, December 18, 2012, https://www.yahoo.com/news/mass-school-bombing-1927-puts-sandy-hook-context-185608674.html, accessed on May 16, 2018.
[461] Schudson, 351.
[462] David Willbern, "*Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* by Cathy Caruth (review)." *American Imago* 74, no. 2 (2017): 187.

Caruth speaks of trauma as a "parable of the wound and the voice," noting that it is not merely a wound but "the story of a wound that cries out."[463] "Trauma," she says, "does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned."[464] Trauma is hard to fully comprehend because it is not the actual memory, nor is it easily converted into a human narrative. Trauma then leaves behind "a fractured link between external assault and internal response, or between wound and psyche. It's a voice crying out but only partially heard."[465] This internal voice remains strong over time. Traumatic experience, as was the case with Bath's survivors, has a unique capacity to renew itself within individual memory without succumbing to emotional or psychological fading. The effects of distanciation are held at bay. For better or worse, at least some memories of May 18, 1927, remained fresh.

In reference to the past receding during the process of distanciation, Schudson notes that, "Constructing cultural objects as memoirs of the past may mitigate the ebbing of memory, but they battle an ultimately irresistible force."[466] The force to which he is referring is a tendency of those who remember strongly – having a lasting, intense memory of an event makes participants not want to see or experience physical reminders of it. In Bath, this effect is evident in the decades of public silence, in the initial reluctance to the creation of the memorial park, and at least somewhat in the opposition to a mainstream movie adaptation, though residents certainly had other legitimate concerns in regard to this matter. Schudson states that if memory retains intensity, as it certainly did within Bath's survivors, it at times does so at the expense of sentimentality. Robert Musil notes that anything that endures strongly over time in our minds sacrifices its ability to make an outward impression – "Anything that constitutes the walls of our life, the backdrop of our consciousness, so to

[463] Willbern, 188.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Schudson, 349.

speak, forfeits its capacity to play a role in that consciousness."[467] For quite some time, memory of the disaster raged strongly in personal memory, yet bubbled beneath the surface publicly. Eventually, this changed.

A major impetus spurring survivors to talk arrived in the form of modern tragedies. A relatively early example of this came in 1987 with the crash of Northwest Airlines Flight 255 in Detroit. All on board were killed, 154 people, with the exception of 4-year-old Cecelia Cichan. The crash is the deadliest aviation crash in Michigan history. It rekindled the pain and memories of survivors Donald Huffman and Earl Proctor, both seriously injured in the Bath disaster. They cited Cichan's survival, while miraculous, as a reminder of the especially cruel pain that disasters can inflict on surviving children.[468] For years after this, the Bath disaster was still a subject seldom publicly discussed – until the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City was bombed on April 19, 1995, killing 168 people, 19 of them young children.[469] Survivor Vina May Shepard Fisk, a Bath second grader in 1927, stated in 2005:

> When they had that thing out in Oklahoma, it affected me terribly and it did my brother too. It was almost like going through it again or worse. I don't know what it was; I couldn't explain it to anybody. It just brought every bit of that back, you know, to blow up a place… I could never explain to anybody how it affected me, but it bothered me for quite a long time. I don't know why it hit home. There have been awful things since but it hasn't affected me like that.[470]

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[467] Ibid.
[468] Chris Christoff, "2 Children of '27 tragedy say crash revives suffering," *Detroit Free Press*, August 26, 1987, 1A.
[469] Chris Golembiewski, "Bath explosion still haunts community," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 2000, B3; John McGuire, "'27 bombing at school tore lives, town apart: 'Deranged farmer' killed 38 children and 7 adults," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 29, 1995, 13B; "Blood Bath," *Dateline NBC*, April 17, 1996.
[470] Vina May Shepard Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Fisk's home, Ashton, Michigan, part of *Sparrow Hospital Oral History Program*, July 28, 2005.

School violence snapped to the forefront of America's attention in 1999 when 13 were murdered at Columbine High School in Colorado, and, once again, painful memories that had been dormant came flooding back to Bath's survivors. The Columbine shooting caused Josephine Cushman Vail to speak out publicly for the first time.[471] Chester McGonigal, who was in his second floor classroom when Kehoe's bombs exploded the school, stated that every time he sees a massacre covered on the news, it takes him back to the tenth grade and images of "dead kids laying on the ground" return to mind.[472] Similarly, in 2007 when 32 were murdered on Virginia Tech's campus, survivors had to grapple with reliving their experience 80 years prior. "It changes everything. It's there in the back of your head, but you kind of skim over it," survivor Dean Sweet told a reporter in 2001. "After a while, it gets to the point where it doesn't bother you as much, until something happens and brings it back to you. You never forget it. It's always there." Despite some survivors' wishes to suppress the events of May 18, 1927, news coverage of horrifying events like that at Oklahoma City, Columbine High School, and Virginia Tech, did not let them do so.[473] It did, however, trigger them to speak out.

Psychological Effects

Once survivors and their family members began to speak to the press and other interviewers, a common topic discussed was psychological disturbances caused by the trauma of the disaster – effects that were both immediate and lasted for decades. Commonly reported occurrences were nightmares, being highly sensitive to loud noises, guilt, and having a particularly difficult time coping emotionally each year at the disaster's anniversary. For many young people, the disaster

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[471] Eric Johnson, "Bath School survivor: 'You never forget'," *UPI News Track*, April 22, 1999.
[472] Kelly Collins, "Columbine incident recalls '27 massacre," *USAToday.com*, April 28, 1999.
[473] Francis Donnelly, "Haunting massacre: 80 years later, survivors in Bath still trying to forget school bombing," *The Detroit News*, April 28, 2007, 9A; Hugh Leach, "80 years ago, deadly bombing scarred Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 2007.

marked the beginning of a childhood lost, an innocence shattered. They simply were not the same after it. Josephine Cushman Vail spoke in 2007 of losing her beloved brother, Ralph. She was 13 years old in May of 1927. "When he went, my childhood left me at that time," she said. "It seemed to vanish. I don't know what the reason was. I wasn't that kid anymore. I was more grown up… more something… more…I don't know what. My young life seemed to go away then; I was older."[474]

The psychological effects of witnessing the Bath disaster were lifelong. Frank Pritchard, police reporter for *The Lansing State Journal* in 1927, was present at the school that day. In 1967, he recalled that what he saw – children trapped and screaming among the rubble – affected him more than anything that he witnessed in World War II.[475] Bath resident Lloyd Curtis was 19 years old. He had a friend whose family owned an ambulance and funeral company in Lansing; the company was having a difficult time finding drivers to deliver bodies. Curtis volunteered. He and his friend then worked for two days shoveling body parts into 5-gallon buckets for delivery to Lansing – parts of skulls, fingers, sections of legs and feet. Curtis never quite got over the experience. As his brother stated, "That scar never left him."[476]

George Carpenter was a 21-year-old rookie on the Michigan State Police force when he was called to the scene of the exploded school. When he arrived, he and his fellow officers came to the aid of teacher Hazel Weatherby.[477] Her lower half was completely buried in timber and bricks, but her arms remained tightly wrapped around two children, one on each side. Their tiny hands clutched

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[474] Josephine Cushman Vail, interview by Arnie Bernstein, December 9, 2007, interview transcript courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.
[475] Frank Hand, "Bath plans memorial to victims of 1927 school disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, November 25, 1989, 3B.
[476] R.G. Curtis (brother of Lloyd Curtis), interview by Arnie Bernstein, June 2, 2007, interview transcript courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.
[477] Colleen Cason, "Before Columbine: Oak View man witnessed day 72 years ago when terror reigned at schoolhouse," *Ventura County Star*, January 16, 2000, B1.

her dress.[478] Barely conscious, she managed to hand the children over to police. She then fell back dead. The two children in her care were also deceased. The next morning, it was he and another officer who discovered the body of Nellie Kehoe on the Kehoe farm. The officers went to take a cigarette break behind the only remaining building, and found her remains tied to a makeshift crate. What he witnessed during that time, Carpenter said, stayed with him for his entire life. He felt fear and anxiety for quite some time afterward. "Then, over time, the Lord took that gradually away," he said.[479]

Nightmares were pervasive and persistent among survivors. For many, they began immediately following the disaster. Martha Horton was a freshman at the time and remembered the blast lifting her out of her seat. She made her way outside of the school and thought she was safe, but then Kehoe's truck exploded. "I was scared stiff," she recalled. "Later, I couldn't sleep and worried my home would blow up. It took years for some of us to get over it."[480] Survivors Ava Sweet Nelson and Vina May Shepard Fisk also reported having nightmares for years.[481]

Being sensitive to sudden, loud noises was a commonly reported side effect of surviving the Bath disaster. This effect exhibited itself early, at the time when Bath Consolidated School's classes were being held at various buildings around town due to the school's ongoing rebuild. One such building used for class instruction was the Ewing's store in downtown Bath. One day in the fall of 1927, local boys were installing a radio antenna on top of the Ewing store. They jumped onto its metal roof, causing an unexpected jolt of loud sound. All students in the store bolted outside. "We was out on the street, just that quick," Chester McGonigal said, with a finger snap. "Everybody.

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[478] "Local graduate death victim in Bath disaster," *Mount Pleasant Times and Isabella County Enterprise*, May 26, 1927, 1.
[479] Cason, B1.
[480] Sally Trout, "Bath remembers 1927 school bombing," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 7, 2002, B3.
[481] "Reunion stirs memories of Bath blast, its victims," *Detroit Free Press*, June 4, 1985, 10A; Vina May Shepard Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Fisk's home, Ashton, Michigan, part of *Sparrow Hospital Oral History Program*, July 28, 2005.

Gone."[482] Several survivors reported that loud noises affected them throughout most of their lives, thunderstorms and fireworks being the most common culprits.[483] Ninety-year-old Lee Mast recalled in 2007, "It didn't take much of anything to set me off. Everything was scary."[484]

The anniversary of the disaster was a difficult time for many survivors. Loretta Hart Wilcox, whose father worked in the rescue effort, remembered her father crying every May 18.[485] A nurse at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing recalled a woman who required hospital care annually on the anniversary. In the sixth grade in 1927, her best friend was Iola Hart. That morning, Iola had picked a bouquet of lilacs for her teacher, Mrs. Blanche Harte. Both the child and her teacher were killed instantly in the school explosion, crushed by the floor above. Each anniversary, the patient relived overhearing a rescue worker talking of finding Iola and Mrs. Harte, the bouquet of lilacs still in the teacher's hand. The memory came to be too much for her to handle.[486] For some, it was not the calendar date that triggered grief, but the feeling of the day itself. Florence Harte, who lost her son Robert in the blasts, told of days in which the sky would look a certain way. It would transport her back to that horrible day, and she could not escape the sorrow.[487]

Family members of the deceased reported guilt in the wake of the Bath disaster. One child who lost multiple siblings still held a burden of guilt, even as an elderly man. He was home sick that

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[482] Dennis Pfaff, "Dynamite killed 45 people in Bath, Mich., 60 years ago: School board member's deadly revenge on town's children recalled," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1987; Vina May Shepard Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Fisk's home, Ashton, Michigan, part of *Sparrow Hospital Oral History Program*, July 28, 2005.
[483] Francis Donnelly, "Haunting Massacre: 80 years later, survivors in Bath still trying to forget school bombing," *The Detroit News*, April 28, 2007, 9A; Vina May Shepard Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Fisk's home, Ashton, Michigan, part of *Sparrow Hospital Oral History Program*, July 28, 2005; Susan Hagerman (daughter of Raymond Eschtruth), interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Bath School Disaster 90th Commemoration, Bath, Michigan, May 20, 2017.
[484] Donnelly, 9A.
[485] Hugh Leach, "80 years ago, deadly bombing scarred Bath," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 2007.
[486] Jean Frazier, *A Century of Caring: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital Centennial History 1896-1996* (Lansing: Edward W. Sparrow Hospital, 1996), 88; Dawn Voorheis Hawks, *A Time & Times: My Memoirs* (San Bernardino: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, 2016), 97-98.

[487] Patti Seehase (granddaughter of Florence Harte), interview by Arnie Bernstein, June 2, 2007, interview transcript courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.

day, and was therefore not in the school.[488] Parents too carried guilt over matters of "what if" or "if only." The morning of May 18 was unusual for Florence Harte. Her son, Robert, usually loved going to school, but he was having final exams that day, and did not feel prepared. He told his mother that he did not want to go. "You're going to go, and you'll do better than you think," she said to him. After he perished in the school, that statement haunted her for the remainder of her life. She could not forgive herself.[489] Guilt in some cases transferred to the next generation, as was the case with Jerry Harte. Robert Harte would have been Jerry's uncle, had he not died in the disaster. Florence Harte gave birth to Jerry's father four years after the school explosion, causing him to wonder if he or his father would have been born if it were not for Kehoe's actions.[490]

The survivors who experienced the worst physical injury seemed to shoulder more severe psychological effects. Donald Huffman suffered the most injuries of anyone pulled alive from the rubble. Unconscious for ten days due to head injury, he lost a portion of his face and one eye; his legs were crushed, one arm was broken, and his body was covered in lacerations. Though it took years, Huffman did physically recover. He got married at age 31. He stated that his marriage was the best thing to happen to him, but the bombing heavily factored into his decision not to have children. "I figured they may have the same luck I did," he said. "I wasn't sure something wouldn't happen to them. I didn't want no part of that if it did."[491]

Earl Proctor, whose father passed away in 1924, spent more than a year in and out of hospitals after the bombings. One of only 13 sixth-graders to survive, he broke both of his legs in multiple places and injured his back. He recalled being almost completely submerged in debris, only

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[488] Kim Baer, "A surprising precedent: School massacres aren't modern evil," *The Free Lance-Star*, April 22, 2007.
[489] Patti Seehase (granddaughter of Florence Harte), interview by Arnie Bernstein, June 2, 2007, interview transcript courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.
[490] "May's darkest day," *Harte's Stuff* online blog, May 15, 2002, vol. 1, no. 18, accessed November 2, 2007, copy courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.
[491] Christoff, "2 children of '27 tragedy say crash revives suffering,"1A.

able to move his fingers. Soon after one hospital release, Proctor was fitted for leg braces. The store clerk looked down at him sternly and said, "Who is going to pay for them?" This experience created within him a lasting fear of poverty. He also became acutely sensitive to other's suffering, often thinking of World War II soldiers dying in battle with no medical aid and no rescuers.[492]

The Next Generation

The second generation, the children of survivors who grew up in Bath in the 1950s and 1960s, were surrounded by physical reminders of the Bath disaster. Even without the *Girl with a Cat* sculpture greeting them at the start of each school day, there were visual reminders. Johanna Cushman Balzer, whose parents both survived the blasts, recalled riding in the school bus and passing the old Kehoe property daily. "The old hand pump still stood there. The trees were gnarled and twisted," she recalled. "It was always in our faces."[493] George Baird's sons told of the farmhouse chimney remaining for decades, a seemingly eternal reminder.[494] Lynwood McGonigal remembered two neighbors from his childhood who were survivors – one was missing an eye and another a foot.[495] Ann Marie Hill, who attended James Couzens Agricultural School until the sixth grade, told of she and her classmates looking up at the school's ceiling and seeing cracks still present from the explosion. "The children knew something terrible had happened in that basement. So, whenever we walked by it, we flattened ourselves against the wall and then just ran out the door," she recalled.[496]

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[492] Ibid.
[493] Scott Dav, "Community wrestles with best way to commemorate Bath School disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 2012.
[494] Judy Putnam, "Evil of Bath School disaster remembered 89 years later," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 2016.
[495] Robert Snell, "Bath remembers '27 school tragedy," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 2002, B3.
[496] Charlie Cain, "The day the children died," *City Limits*, May 1999, 33-35.

Other reminders were less physically obvious, but none the less effectual. Despite being rarely addressed in conversation, the disaster carried an emotional weight within families. The children of survivors were aware of its heavy presence. Some reported the taboo of saying Kehoe's name aloud within their families. Balzer's mother, Wilma Cressman Cushman, equated saying his name with speaking an obscenity.[497] The Baird boys grew up knowing that Kehoe's name was equivalent to evil.[498] Barbara Wilkins' mother, Lillian Reed, suffered two broken legs in the disaster and lost all of her teeth. Even though the disaster was not spoken of much during Wilkins' childhood, what little talk there was created a fear of going to school within Wilkins as a young child.[499] Susan Hagerman, daughter of survivor Raymond Eschtruth, commented, "Growing up, it was just always there. We didn't really talk about it because people couldn't talk about it, and when they did, they broke down. My dad could never talk about it without crying. He couldn't hear loud explosions; they would scare him. So, you know, it was just there my whole life."[500]

Schudson notes that the reshaping of memory over time has some positive aspects. Though detail can be lost and memory become somewhat vague, the passage of time can grant historical perspective. People can increasingly view from multiple perspectives an event that they could originally only view from a single perspective.[501] The disaster's lingering influence within the lives of the second generation yielded strength and resilience. "Years later, we still look at ourselves as

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[497] "Survivors recall 1927 Michigan school massacre," *StoryCorps: Morning edition of National Public Radio*, April 17, 2009; Patti Seehase (granddaughter of Florence Harte), interview by Arnie Bernstein, June 2, 2007, interview transcript courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.

[498] Judy Putnam, "Remembering the Bath explosion," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 17, 2017, 1.

[499] John McGuire, "'27 bombing at school tore lives, town apart; 'Deranged farmer' killed 38 children and adults," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 29, 1995, 13B.

[500] Susan Hagerman (daughter of Raymond Eschtruth), interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Bath School Disaster 90th Commemoration, Bath, Michigan, May 20, 2017.

[501] Schudson, 349.

survivors," Balzer told *National Public Radio.* "So you look after one another differently, because you know that the absolutely unthinkable can happen – even going to school."[502]

While the survivors might have wished that the world forget, their children value remembrance. Their parents did not speak out for decades, but members of the second generation have now taken the survivors' place as speakers. In 2017, *The Lansing State Journal* stated that this generation "recognizes that the victims should not be forgotten. And, in memory, there is healing."[503] Bruce Dunham, son of survivor Irene Babcock Dunham, emphasized that an important way to honor victims and survivors is to remember the bombings.[504] Susan Hagerman wrote in 1996, "As horrifying as the school disaster was, I think it's important for the younger and the newer people in the community to know what happened. It's not meant to flaunt negative events, but rather to show how a small community came together in love and concern at a time of tragedy. It shows how caring they were and still are."[505] The second generation shoulders the local Bath School Museum, the disaster's commemoration events, and acts as the protector and projector of the disaster's public memory.

Members of the second generation are among the first to be interviewed at times in which the Bath disaster emerges in regional or local news – either at its milestone anniversaries or at times of modern school violence. When Barbara Wilkins was interviewed in 1999 after the Columbine shooting, she said of the disaster, "It's history, and you hope to learn from it." After a pause, she added, "It seems the wrong people are learning too much."[506] She may have had a point. In the

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[502] Survivors recall 1927 Michigan school massacre," *StoryCorps: Morning edition of National Public Radio,* April 17, 2009.
[503] "90 years later: Remembering the Bath School Disaster," *The Lansing State Journal,* May 17, 2017, 11A.
[504] Rachel Greco, "Bath School bombing: Oldest surviving student recalls how 'awful it was,'" *The Lansing State Journal,* May 14, 2017, 1.
[505] Susan Hagerman, "Bath school disaster remembered," *The Lansing State Journal,* April 1, 1996, 11.
[506] Steve Bennish, "Farmer left scars of horror: He committed the worst school slaughter in U.S. history, leaving 45 dead, including himself," *Dayton Daily News,* May 2, 1999, 1A.

spring of 2014, police intercepted 17-year-old John LaDue, who was in the midst of planning a school massacre at his high school in Minnesota. The police caught up with him before he could carry out his elaborate murder plan, the details of which LaDue had been planning for more than a year. When police found him in his storage locker, he was surrounded by a cache of ball bearings, a pressure cooker and other bomb-making chemicals. He had guns and ammunition at home, and plans to kill his mother, father, and sister.[507] When LaDue was interviewed following his arrest, he cited Kehoe among his influences, telling police, "There is one that you probably never heard of like back in 1927, and his name was Andrew Kehoe. He killed like 45 with, like, dynamite and stuff."[508]

Modern School Tragedies

Though the Bath School disaster is not widely discussed in national press, if one seeks it out, one can find mention of the tragedy. It is most commonly discussed in relation to modern school shootings. Journalists and editorial writers point out the value in learning from our past, even, and perhaps especially, a past that has largely been forgotten. They look to Bath as a glaring example of this type of violence not being exclusive to modern times, as a source of courage and inspiration for communities experiencing similar tragedies, and, in a practical sense, as a lesson in emergency preparedness.

In fact, violence in American schools began well before that horrible day in May of 1927. The earliest recorded incident occurred in 1764 in a time of extreme tension between the Lenape tribe of Native Americans and white settlers in Pennsylvania. On the morning of July 26, school master Enoch Brown was teaching 11 children, two girls and nine boys, when three Lenape tribesmen approached the schoolhouse door. Seeing their weapons, Brown pleaded with them to take

[507] Pam Louwagie, "Trying to escape shadow of dread," *Star Tribune*, May 21, 2017.
[508] Malcolm Gladwell, "Thresholds of violence: How school shootings catch on," *The New Yorker*, October 19, 2015.

only his life and not that of the children. Enoch was shot and killed first. The students were then bludgeoned and scalped. Two children who were scalped miraculously survived, albeit with lifetime mental and emotional trauma.[509]

In the mid to late 1800s, it was common for boys to carry pistols with them throughout their daily activities. In what seems a precursor to modern commentary, the *Los Angeles Herald* stated in 1874 after the shooting death of a child at school:

> This boy lost his life through the too-common habit among boys of carrying deadly weapons. We do not know that this habit can be broken up. We do not know that school teachers have the right, or would exercise it if they had, of searching the pockets of their pupils, but it seems almost a necessity that such a rule be enforced.[510]

In 1883, Lem Harbaugh opened fire on a group of school children at the Ponca Creek schoolhouse in Nebraska, killing three.[511] Many deem what happened next in 1891 as the first actual mass shooting at a school, even though none perished. On April 9, 70-year-old James Foster approached the playground of St. Mary's Parochial School in Newburgh, New York, and began firing a shotgun at a group of children. None were killed, but five were injured.[512] This incident garnered more press than others, likely because it occurred 60 miles from a major metropolitan area. Two years later, on March 26, 1893, a gunman began shooting at a high school dance in Louisiana, killing two and injuring three.[513]

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[509] Bill Hand, "The first school shooting was in 1864," *Sun Journal*, April 6, 2018; "School shootings: A history – Part one of a series on mass murders in the U.S.," *Lexington Examiner*, September 23, 2012.
[510] Dennis Dalman, "U.S. history is riddled with school shootings," *Sartell Newsleader*, May 16, 2013.
[511] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Jaymi Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2016), 30.
[512] Bryan Delohery, "Mass shootings may be a symptom of a much larger problem," *Spartan Daily*, February 11, 2013; "The first mass school shooting – St. Mary's Parochial School, Newburgh, New York, 1891," February 17, 2018, Accessed February 6, 2019, https://unholypursuit.wordpress.com/2018/02/17/the-first-mass-school-shooting-st-marys-parochial-school-newburgh-new-york-1891/.
[513] Schildkraut and Elsass, 32-33.

Similar to the Bath disaster, these tragedies occurring in the 1800s are not collectively well-known. Modern reporters and columnists are quick to mention then the most immediate factor to come to mind when one first learns of the Bath disaster – that mass murder in schools was not born in the modern era. Michigan journalist Kristina Riggle, whose mother grew up in Bath, wrote that psychologists can say what they may about violent video games and TV in our society, but "our modern culture has no monopoly on murderous psychopaths."[514] *The Dallas Morning News* reported, at the tenth anniversary of Columbine, that while some view incidents at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech as "chilling symptoms of a modern America where greed and violence have eclipsed the simple, neighborly values of an earlier era," the Bath School disaster proves otherwise.[515] Missouri columnist Ray Hartmann discussed the Bath tragedy in 1999 following the Columbine shootings, noting that, "As awful as the world feels to many today, there were senseless killings and youth crime in great-grandpa's day as well."[516]

After Seung-Hui Cho murdered 32 on the campus of Virginia Tech in 2007, a California columnist cited Andrew Kehoe as an example of "crazed gunmen and mad bombers being around for as long as there have been guns to fire and bombs to set."[517] Richard Roeper of *The Chicago Sun-Times* pointed out that, "The world isn't any scarier in 2007 than it was in 1977 or 1937. We just have a lot more ways of holding up a mirror to ourselves."[518] Similarly, when 20 children and six adults were murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, *Chicago Tribune* columnist John

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[514] Kristina Riggle, "Bombing in Bath: Author explores how technology, anger fueled 1927 mass killing," *The Grand Rapids Press,* August 30, 2009, I2.
[515] Jacquielynn Floyd, "Columbine massacre elicits many theories, no answers," *The Dallas Morning News,* April 24, 2009, 1B.
[516] Ray Hartmann, "Revelations on tragedy and the young," *Riverfront Times,* April 28, 1999.
[517] Steve Lambert, "Carnage can't tell us much," *The Sun,* April 22, 2007.
[518] Richard Roeper, "Does current generation have it worse? Some seem to think so, but media's glare can distort," *The Chicago Sun-Times,* April 25, 2007, 11.

Kass said the Bath School tragedy tells us that, "Madness is not some modern affliction – it's a human condition."[519]

The disaster in Bath has also been noted over the years as a source of encouragement for communities faced with similar circumstances. In 1943, the *Detroit Free Press* compared Andrew Kehoe to Adolf Hitler, saying that Bath's courage and resiliency should serve as inspiration to communities targeted by Hitler's bombs.[520] After the Murrah Federal Building was bombed in 1995, Oklahoma City officials wrote to Bath, inquiring as to how the township dealt with disaster aftermath.[521] Bath survivor Josephine Cushman Vail sought to help survivors of the Columbine shooting in 1999, when she told a reporter her advice for them – "You gotta just have faith, you gotta be strong, and go on."[522] In a 2001 *Detroit Free Press* article that discussed life in Bath after 9/11, journalist Jeff Seidel stated:

> Something is ingrained in this community, something stronger than fear. It is a sense of duty passed from one generation to the next. They can't wait to help each other. That's how this community has survived. That's what farmers do. Even if they aren't farmers anymore. Perhaps, this is the biggest lesson in Bath. This is what these people can teach those in New York and Washington, D.C. The fear will always be there but there is no reason to feel helpless. After seeing the worst, you have to try to live your life as normally as possible, while being prepared for it to return. You have to know you are ready for it.[523]

As *Bath Massacre: America's First School Bombing* author Arnie Bernstein noted, the people of Bath showed us how we survive and heal as best we can in the face of unimaginable

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[519] John Kass, "Groping for explanations…. when there aren't any," *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 2012, 12.
[520] Ralph Goll and Donald Scram, "The strange case of the village Hitler and the slaughtered innocents," 18th edition in the "Michigan's Famous Murders" series, *Detroit Free Press,* May 16, 1943.
[521] Vina May Shepard Fisk, interview by Geneva Wiskemann, Fisk's home, Ashton, Michigan, part of *Sparrow Hospital Oral History Program*, July 28, 2005.

[522] Eric Johnson, "Bath School survivor: 'You never forget'," *UPI News Track*, April 22, 1999.
[523] Jeff Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," *Detroit Free Press,* December 9, 2001, 1J. This article is featured in the Bath School Museum.

horror, and that "the human spirit is strong, resilient and collectively stronger as a force of good than the terror and evil of the senseless acts of a few."[524]

From a practical point of view, police officers and emergency preparedness professionals look to Bath as a site of learning, with the aim of strengthening our modern security measures. In courses such as the "How to Survive an Active Shooter in your Place of Worship" seminar in Illinois, participants learn, through the example of Andrew Kehoe, that "active shooters" have been around for a long time and that these killers can be wielding other weapons – not just guns. They also learn that a mass murderer can be anyone, even someone as trusted as Kehoe; class participants are advised not to get a preconceived notion of the perpetrator in their minds.[525] Law enforcement officials in Texas cited Kehoe's rigging of Bath Consolidated School as an example of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, going back decades – not a new phenomenon at all.[526] Captain Perry Hollowell, a police academy instructor in Indiana, noted Kehoe's behavior leading up to May 18, 1927, telling *The Tribune-Star* that, even then, "The warning signs were evident throughout the small town but no one thought much about it until too late."[527] His hope was that in modern times, society can be more attuned to these signs.

Academics who study terrorism note that the Bath School disaster remains the only time in American history that that a bomb has killed children in a school. There is no other crime that is threatened so often – via school bomb threats – yet materializes so rarely. The perpetrators at

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[524] Arnie Bernstein, "Q & A with Arnie Bernstein, author of *Bath Massacre: America's First School Bombing*," Radio interview, 2009, audio courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.
[525] Pam Monson, "Learn to be a survivor – workshop will teach participants how to survive an active shooter situation," *The Free Press Advocate* (Illinois), March 15, 2016; Jessica Lane, "Active shooter seminar arms citizens with preparation," *The Express Star* (Oklahoma), October 28, 2016.
[526] Libby Cluett, "Drill tests local emergency preparedness, response – Area law enforcement stage 'active shooter' exercise at high school," *Mineral Wells Index* (Texas), August 21, 2013.
[527] "Knowing warning signs, communication can help prevent tragedies," *The Tribune-Star* (Indiana), April 16, 2008.

Columbine High School, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, brought 76 homemade bombs and grenades into the school cafeteria. All failed to detonate. Experts point out that when people have a true intent to kill, as in Bath, or Columbine, or on the campus of Virginia Tech, noticeably absent is an intentional warning of any kind.[528] The Bath School disaster is a reminder, however, that any utterance of the word "bomb" in a school needs to be taken with grim seriousness.[529] As Minnesota journalist Brian Ojanpa pointed out, even though Bath Consolidated School's destruction was not planned by a student, nor did a bomb threat precede it, the "wild card dynamic American schools must deal with is that someday a student will skew that logic all to hell, announce a threat, then carry it through."[530]

While many schools across the country experience bomb threats, the citizens of Bath have had a particularly difficult time with them over the years. Going on for decades, the pranks have typically occurred at disaster anniversaries or after media coverage, leaving some in Bath weary of the disaster being publicly mentioned.[531] When bomb scares occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, those attending school at the time were children of survivors, causing their parents extreme panic and distress.[532] During each threat, children were evacuated. A switchboard operator telephoned the entire town, and a siren was sounded. Members of the volunteer fire department then searched James Couzens Agricultural School inch by inch. They meticulously scanned attic rafters, still blown apart in places, and searched the old boiler room which still showed significant patching from its 1928

[528] Bob Shaw, "At every bomb hoax, the same fear – selfish motives drive pranks that officials don't dare to ignore," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 30, 2007, 1A.
[529] Michael Paul Williams, "Zero tolerance for school bomb threats," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, November 2, 2007, B1.
[530] Brian Ojanpa, "No school wants to be 'the first'", *The Mankato Free Press*, March 9, 2012.
[531] Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," 1J. This article is featured in the Bath School Museum.
[532] Alice Loomis (daughter of Ava Sweet), interview by Arnie Bernstein, June 2, 2007, interview transcript courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.

restoration. The Bath superintendent was called when all was clear, sending relief to a distraught group of re-traumatized parents.[533]

For disaster survivors, the bomb scares were one more experience that would not let them forget. Years later, on April 21, 1999, the day after the Columbine shooting, some members of a next generation of Bath parents chose not to send their children to school, for fear that someone would come back to finish the job that Kehoe started. "Bomb threats at any school are horrible," Bath Elementary School secretary Beth Crofts said. "Here, it makes us angry. It hits a little different."[534]

Ultimately, the Bath disaster being collectively forgotten is due to a myriad of interconnected factors – some psychological and some sociological. For many survivors, intense internal trauma resulted in public silence, a persistent quietness that had a bit of a domino effect. It became its own small culture of silence, as survivors witnessed the hushed methods in which their neighbors were coping. This silence was so strong and so widespread that it snuffed out the chance for the story to persevere over time. Modern mentions of the disaster are few and typically not presented on a large platform – more so in editorials or the latter pages of newspapers. Nationally, the disaster has become an interesting statistic reported by thorough journalists who choose to mention the history of mass killings in schools, as well as being cited by editorial writers interested in gun control issues. Rarely is the Bath disaster given the media prominence it warrants.

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[533] Wayne Loomis (son-in-law of Ava Sweet), interview by Arnie Bernstein, June 2, 2007, interview transcript courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.
[534] Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," 1J. This article is featured in the Bath School Museum.

CHAPTER 6:

MEMORY WITHIN LOCAL TRADITION

Though few remember the Bath disaster on a national scale, this is not the case within Bath itself. It took a number of decades for this internal remembrance to begin to express itself outwardly, but once begun, it continued to grow. The disaster's presence in local memory can be seen in the creation of James Couzens Memorial Park, within the Bath School Museum, in books and plays, at anniversary commemorations, and in the special attention given to the graves of children that, decades later, still remained unmarked.

James Couzens Memorial Park

Through the process of conventionalization, the past that comes to be known to future generations is the one that is created or specifically constructed. Memories are prepared, planned, and rehearsed both individually and socially. One way in which conventionalization occurs is memorialization. Turning a place or an object into a monument or memorial is a form of commemoration, and it changes the past in the very process.[535] Sociologist Barry Schwartz notes that a commemorated event or place is "invested with an extraordinary significance and assigned a qualitatively distinct place in our conception of the past."[536] "Commemoration lifts from an ordinary

[535] Schudson, 359.
[536] Barry Schwartz, "The social context of commemoration: A study in collective memory," *Social Forces* 61, no. 2 (1982): 377.

historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values," Schwartz states. It is, in this sense, a "register of sacred history."[537]

Geographers term this process of creating a sacred space "sanctification." A site is set apart from its surroundings and dedicated to the memory of an event, person, or group. Sanctification clearly establishes the relationship between landscape and memory.[538] The Bath Consolidated School was originally a site of rectification – it was returned to its original use post-tragedy and made even better than before with expansion. Decades later and after demolition, it transitioned to one of sanctification.

Though for years there was not much talk within the Bath community on how to commemorate the Bath disaster, the issue was forced to the forefront in 1975 when school board officials began to discuss tearing down the James Couzens Agricultural School. In their view, the building was outdated and had grown too costly to repair. It was ultimately razed that year and a new high school was built in a different location. The decision to demolish the school that was so carefully rebuilt in 1928 angered many survivors.[539] "They tore it down, which they should never have done," survivor Dean Sweet said in 2001. "I didn't want it to go down. I tried to fight it. It was terrible. They could have fixed that up and had it for so many things, like the library. They could have had the senior center there. It was such a waste."[540] Upon the school's demolition, James Couzens Memorial Park was established in its place. Not all parts of the original school were destroyed; the cupola, which even survived the 1927 bombings, is preserved in the park to this day.

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[537] Ibid.
[538] Kenneth Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 8.
[539] Betty Jane Minsky, "Wreckers prepared to raze 'Bath disaster' school," *The Lansing State Journal*, December 9, 1975.
[540] Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," 1J. This article is featured in the Bath School Museum.

Other memorial structures display victims' names. A state historical marker was placed there in 1992.[541]

The years since the memorial park was established have not been without controversy. In 2012, the Bath Township Board proposed that a new school bombing memorial be placed in Couzens Park – a pavilion with a $45,000 budget. But, not all community members agreed with the idea.[542] It was especially unpopular with remaining survivors. Josephine Cushman Vail wanted the park to remain as is – no new pavilion. "I say leave it. The ground's almost sacred to me," she said. "It's there for the children to play on."[543]

Edward Linenthal notes in his research of the Oklahoma City bombing that there is much at stake when it comes to the creation of an accurate memorial. "It is never enough for a bereaved community just to 'remember'," he writes. "It must strive for exactitude in what is being remembered, who is being remembered, and the forms through which remembrance is expressed. Such memorial precision is a way of paying what people understand as their debt to the dead."[544] Failure to accomplish this – to mischaracterize an event's significance or to commemorate in inappropriate ways – can be perceived as a defilement of memory.[545] The Parks Board in Bath ultimately approved the proposal, and a picnic pavilion was erected within James Couzens Memorial Park. Today, the park is a site for festivals, reunions, and outdoor concerts – as well as for the Bath Farmers Market and the annual Bath Days celebration.[546] Its sacred status is well established within the community.

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[541] Faith Draper, "Bath School disaster Michigan historical marker," *Lansing Examiner*, September 11, 2010, City Guide section.
[542] Mary Jo White, "Proposal for new memorial sent to parks board," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 27, 2012.
[543] Scott Dav, "Community wrestles with best way to commemorate Bath School disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 2012.
[544] Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95.
[545] Ibid.
[546] "Parks – Bath Charter Township," https://bathtownship.us/parks/, accessed on July 25, 2018.

Figure 30: The cupola at James Couzens Memorial Park. It is surrounded by bricks which are inscribed with names of the deceased. Photo taken by author, September 2016.

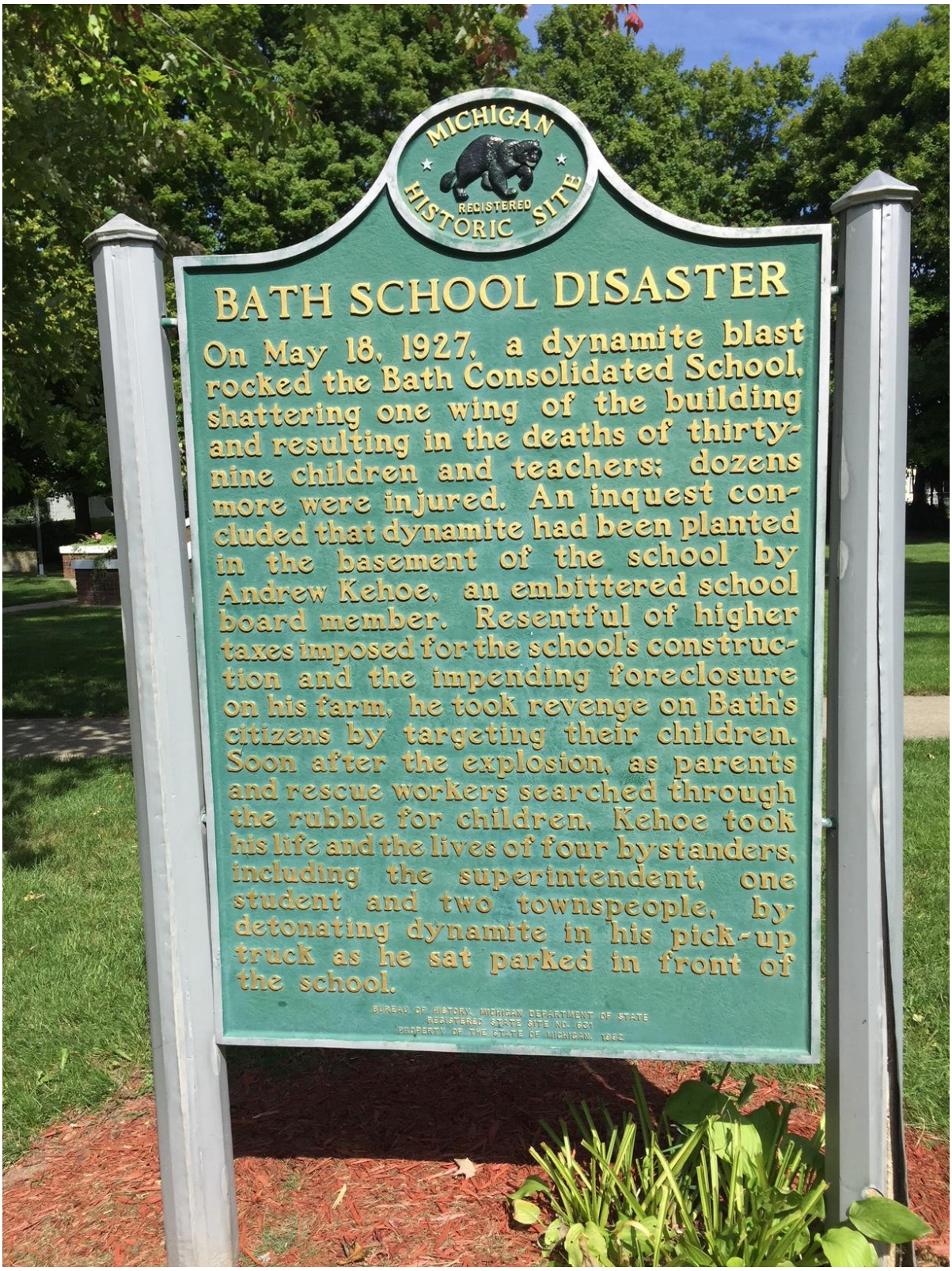

Figure 31: Historical marker at James Couzens Memorial Park. Photo taken by author, September 2016.

The Bath School Museum

Museums have long been a vital memory site, functioning as a place for objects of historical interest to be properly cared for and exhibited. As Schudson notes, recorded or archived materials are far more likely to enter into collective memory than objects which are never recorded or archived (or done so poorly).[547] In 1984, the Bath disaster got a commemorative home within the Bath School Museum. Many searched their closets and attics for relics and artifacts that could be donated for display. The museum opened its doors on November 4 of that year within the all-purpose room of Bath Elementary School.[548] Today, it is located in a long foyer outside of the James Couzens Memorial Auditorium in Bath Middle School. Not only a tribute to the disaster and its victims, it houses a unique collection of memorabilia from more than 160 years of Bath School history, such as class pictures going back more than 100 years, school equipment and uniforms, and student projects.[549] The museum is free and open to the public whenever school is in session or when the auditorium is being used for events. Jeff Seidel, a reporter for the *Detroit Free Press*, made the following observations of the museum during his visit in 2001:

> On one wall, there are pictures of every graduating high school class since 1892, the faces hanging in the air like ghosts. They seem to stare across the long, dark hallway at memorabilia from the explosion, including a haunting picture of Kehoe with his wife. At lunchtime, you can stand in the museum, looking at pictures of death, while hearing the screams and muffled laughter of children on the other side of the wall, playing at recess.[550]

At one end of the museum's foyer sits the Tree of Life, a weeping willow tree of 44 polished ceramic tiles made by Bath eighth-graders in 1998. Each tile of this handcrafted tree represents

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[547] Schudson, 359.
[548] Sheila Schimpf, "Bath's attics opening to fill museum," *The Lansing State Journal*, October 26, 1984.
[549] "Bath School Museum" flyer, obtained in 2017 by the author.
[550] Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," 1J. This article is displayed in the Bath Museum.

someone killed in the Bath disaster. Students in teacher Jeannie Hanson's class selected a person, researched his or her life by talking to family members or reading books, and then created tiles specific to that victim. These tiles depict the victims' likes, their hobbies, their hopes and dreams.[551] Student Jason Van Sickle researched Robert Cochran, who perished at eight years old when the school collapsed. Robert, who went by "Bobby," had dreams of becoming a doctor, a mechanic, and a musician, so Van Sickle crafted his ceramic tile in the shape of the Red Cross logo with a microphone and wrench within it.[552]

As Hanson was pitching the idea to her class, she sketched it out on paper, and told them, "A tree shape symbolic of growth and life, a willow to show sorrow for those who died or were injured, bright tiles for hope – the slight movement of the tiles in a breeze shows life."[553] The project proved effectual in the lives and perspectives of both teacher and students, some of whom had great-grandparents or great-aunts and uncles in the disaster. Students wrote essays after the project, reflecting on the experience; one wrote that he learned "more than just how to play with clay, but how to deal with sad stuff." Another wrote that her heart was "tormented" for the children and their families. "So many innocent victims, wounded, killed, torn apart," she said. "What a selfish and crazed man to do such a thing. 'Why' I ask myself, but I don't know the answer."[554] The Tree of Life, with its steel trunk and carefully crafted tiles, remains a focal point in the museum today – a physical reminder of the compassion and reverence of future generations for those affected by Bath's darkest day.

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[551] Ibid.
[552] Amy Lee, "Memorial fuses hope, remembrance," *The Lansing State Journal,* May 27, 1999, 4B.
[553]Seidel, "Life after terrorism: For Bath, the memory of the 1927 school bombing that killed 44 never goes away," 1J. This article is displayed in the Bath Museum.
[554] Ibid.

Figure 32: Tree of Life sculpture located within the Bath School Museum. Photo taken by author, September 2016.

The Bath School Museum is current home to the "Girl with a Cat" memorial statue. It was initially placed prominently at the entrance of the new James Couzens Agricultural School in 1928. University of Michigan sculptor Carleton W. Angell created the model which was later cast in

bronze.[555] School children from all areas of Michigan, from approximately 100 schools, contributed the more than $1,600 in coins used to fund the sculpture.[556] There is no reminder of the tragedy within this little girl; she is a symbol of innocence and hope for the future.[557] While she is indeed Bath's memorial to the young victims, she is also a symbol of the township's unbroken spirit.[558] Dawn Voorheis Hawks, who attended James Couzens Agricultural School in the 1940s, said of the sculpture which she saw daily in her youth, "She appears to be light-hearted, a tribute to the little lives that should have remained free of care."[559]

[555] Burnett, 220.
[556] Kathie Moore, "The terrible backstory of the little girl statue," *The Hutchinson News*, September 15, 2009. Carlton W. Angell studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, and he later taught art at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. His work can be found throughout the area, most notably within the university's Museum of Natural History, where he served as resident artist. Angell passed away in 1962.
[557] Burnett, 220.
[558] "A New Schoolhouse where 44 Lost Lives," 52.

[559] Dawn Voorheis Hawks, *A Time & Times: My Memoirs* (San Bernardino: Dawn Voorheis Hawks, 2016), 132.

Figure 33: This photograph shows the "Girl with a Cat" bronze sculpture in the entryway of the James Couzens Agricultural School soon after its completion in 1928. Photo courtesy of Theodore Dixon and Laura Smith.

Unmarked Graves

While every child killed in the disaster received a funeral, not all had a tombstone to signify his or her final place of rest. This was rectified when siblings Marjorie and Richard Fritz and Emilie and Robert Bromundt finally received their grave markers. Marjorie Fritz was gifted her headstone in May 2008, the funds being donated by a California couple, Tom and Kelly Stottman. The Stottmans read about the disaster during its anniversary and were greatly affected by the fact that Marjorie did not have a headstone. A small ceremony was held at her grave with the Reverend Mark Johnson of Bath United Methodist Church officiating. To the group gathered there, Johnson spoke of the importance of memorials, of remembering those lost, and of faith in God in times of tragedy. He reminded them that Bath residents supported each other in 1927, pulling people out of the rubble and comforting each other in the aftermath. Even 81 years later, "What we are doing today is part of that healing process," he said.[560] That same year, the Bromundt children received markers due to a grant provided by the George and Elizabeth Seifert Foundation. A ceremony was held for them on November 11, 2008.[561]

It would be six more years before the final child whose death was caused by Andrew Kehoe would receive his headstone. The last unmarked victim's grave belonged to Richard Fritz. His eighth birthday was the day of the disaster, and he survived for almost one year afterward. But, a myocarditis infection, a result of his injuries from the bombing, ultimately claimed his life just eight days shy of his ninth birthday. His tombstone then deems him the "Last Angel - #46," as he is truly another victim of that terrible day. The angel depicted on the stone represents his teacher, Hazel

[560] Kathleen Lavey, "Bath bombing victim gets headstone – 81 years later: Ceremony recalls memory, tragedy of slain 9-year-old," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 22, 2008, A1.

[561] Vince Bond, Jr., "Victims of 1927 Bath bombing to finally get tombstones," *The Lansing State Journal*, November 3, 2008, B1; "Bath tombstones donated," *The Morning Sun*, November 4, 2008, 3.

Weatherby, who perished protecting the children in her care and is therefore shown carrying him to the heavens.[562]

A ceremony was held to dedicate the marker of Richard Fritz in September of 2014; a group of 25 gathered at Mount Hope Cemetery in Lansing. Loretta Stanaway, president of the Friends of Lansing's Historic Cemeteries, told the group that it is hard to fathom what it was like for Fritz to wake up with the excitement of a birthday, only to be engulfed by tragedy – his sister killed, himself seriously injured, his "innocence torn away." "The final injustice of an unmarked grave is put to rest today," she said. And, echoing Reverend Johnson's words from six years prior, "I hope this will be another layer of closure for those who need it."[563] Because the Bath disaster was for decades hidden from public view with no widespread discussion or public calls for remembrance, actions such as these worked to heal some very old wounds – wounds still raw underneath a hardened surface. The physical act of designing and placing a headstone for those seemingly forgotten soothed those still struggling generations later with the lingering sorrow of the Bath bombings.

Upon their deaths, siblings Marjorie and Richard Fritz left behind their father, Francis Fritz, who himself was injured on May 18, 1927, while rescuing children from the school. Upon Kehoe's truck explosion, a bolt sliced into his shoulder, fracturing his shoulder and damaging his elbow.[564] They were also survived by their mother, a sister, and a brother. After the dedication of Richard Fritz's headstone, only one unmarked grave remained from the Bath disaster – that of Andrew Kehoe. It remains so.[565]

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[562] Mary Jo White, "Last victim of 1927 Bath School disaster receives grave marker," *The Lansing State Journal*, September 21, 2014, 3.

[563] Ibid.

[564] M.J. Ellsworth, *The Bath School Disaster* (Self-published, Bath: 1927), 72.

[565] Vikki Dozier, "Last Bath School bombing victim gets grave marker today," *The Lansing State Journal*, September 16, 2014.

Figure 34: The gravestone of Richard Fritz. Photo courtesy of Ron and Johanna Balzer.

Anniversaries

While there is potential for a loss of detail and emotional intensity within memory over time, Schudson notes that within the process of distanciation, there can also be gains. One such gain is perspective – time can grant historical perspective on events that might have been difficult to handle at the time in which they occurred. And, the moral character of memory is highlighted too within the process of distanciation.[566] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka observes that, "The increasing distance in time appears to reframe remembrance, from that of concrete individual actions to one of general cultural

[566] Schudson, 350.

background."[567] For some, this reframing heralds the end of the need to confront the past. For others, the passage of time causes moral lessons to gain significance and therefore warrant more focus on the past. Irwin-Zarecka points out that while distance in time can, in some ways, make the past easier to deal with, "the presence of that past becomes a great deal more pronounced, more widespread."[568] Within this process of distancing and generalization, as the moral challenge emerges and the conception of the past evolves, the burden of that past strengthens.[569]

Enough distance and space in time nurtures a desire to learn what we can from the past, a past that is perhaps viewed with less pain and more openness to various viewpoints. Decades later, then, milestone anniversaries become an apt moment in time to begin to publicly reframe remembrance. "It is no wonder that anniversaries or commemorations of events forty and fifty years in the past become especially significant," Schudson writes, "as the possibility of living memory fades and the only memories that remain are those culturally institutionalized."[570]

The Bath disaster's anniversaries were not publicly acknowledged for decades, but, in 1977, survivor Harold Burnett organized the disaster's first official commemoration event. It was held on a warm and sunny Saturday afternoon – May 21, 1977. Seated around a large speaker's stand set up in recently established James Couzens Memorial Park, there were several honored guests, including Ethel Huyck (Emory Huyck's widow), Floyd Huggett (school principal in 1927), and Nina Matson (teacher injured in the explosion). The event was so well attended that all chairs were filled, and some had to take refuge in shady spots beneath the trees. National guardsmen fired volleys after the name of each victim was read aloud, and Bath Schools Superintendent James Hixson gave the main address. Fearing she would become too emotional, Matson arranged for her son-in-law to read her

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[567] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 94.
[568] Ibid., 95.
[569] Ibid., 95.
[570] Schudson, 350.

account of the day of the disaster. The Bath School Band closed the ceremony; Matson unveiled a new stone marker as the music played. Immediately following, the school board served coffee and refreshments across the street at Bath Middle School.[571]

Local author Grant Parker deemed this first commemorative event especially significant, not just for the events of the program, but also for the impressive turnout and the opportunity for a pleasant reunion of those forever linked by such tragedy. Many survivors had initial qualms about attending. Some felt it might be too emotional. Others had reservations about participating in an event on a site which formerly held their beloved school, a school torn down by decree of the school board – a decision vehemently opposed by some. As Parker stated in 1980, "The disaster generation has never been able to accept or understand the mentality which allowed the great Couzens gift to be neglected and then destroyed."[572] Ultimately, many survivors did attend the fiftieth commemoration.

Beginning around 1987 with the sixtieth anniversary of the disaster, local news outlets began to fairly consistently recognize the disaster's anniversaries in their coverage. And, in 2002, at the seventy-fifth anniversary, another commemorative event was held at James Couzens Memorial Park with more than 200 in attendance.[573] An emotional experience for the survivors who attended, the program included a moment of silence at the time the school collapsed, a children's choir singing "Amazing Grace," and a high school student reciting the "The Last Bell," a poem written in 1939 by Mrs. W.H. Blount. The Bath Area Jaycees announced that they would soon be installing a brick walkway around the cupola, and the names of the deceased would be inscribed on the bricks. The township also dedicated the copper "In Memory" plaque that is embedded in the large rock beside

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[571] Grant Parker, *Mayday: The History of a Village Holocaust* (Lansing: Liberty Press, 1980), 239.

[572] Ibid., 240.

[573] Robert Snell, "Bath remembers '27 school tragedy," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 2002, B3.

the cupola.[574] *The Lansing State Journal* dubbed the event "a celebration of spirit and endurance."[575] Second generation survivor Jerry Harte said that the commemoration event served as a time to "comfort each other regarding the pain the members of our species seem to be so willing to inflict on each other and celebrate the resiliency of the human spirit."[576]

May 18, 2017, marked 90 years since Kehoe's bombs wreaked their destruction on the township of Bath. Members of the Bath School Museum Committee, the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, and *The Lansing State Journal* planned a grand commemorative event. It began with guided tours of the Bath School Museum, and then more than 400 people filled the seats within James Couzens Memorial Auditorium for the program. Superintendent Jake Huffman opened the event, citing the disaster and stating, "Despite these actions by a madman, Bath has never lost its community spirit or educational leadership qualities. We are a proud community who values and supports our schools with a passion."[577] Jack Brown, former Bath Middle School principal and longtime Bath resident, took the floor next to introduce his audio interviews recorded in the 1980s. In college then, Brown chose for a class project to interview disaster survivors, documenting their memories of that tragic day. For many, it was the first time that they had spoken about it in such a public way – the first time these voices were recorded for the historical record.[578]

Matt Martyn's documentary, *The Bath School Disaster*, aired next for the audience. Completed in 2011, it took Martyn five years to complete his research, with some survivors taking

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[574] Sarah Buysse, "Bath remembers 75th anniversary of school bombing," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 2002, B3.

[575] Robert Snell, "Bath remembers '27 school tragedy," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 19, 2002, B3.
[576] "May's darkest day," *Harte's Stuff* online blog, May 15, 2002, vol. 1, no. 18, accessed November 2, 2007, copy courtesy of Arnie Bernstein via the Local History Archives of the Downtown Lansing Public Library.
[577] Jake Huffman, "90th commemoration of Bath School disaster," (Bath Middle School, Bath, Michigan, May 18, 2017.)
[578] "90th commemoration of Bath School disaster," (Bath Middle School, Bath, Michigan, May 18, 2017.)

more than two years to become comfortable enough to speak on camera about the tragedy.[579] Bath High School's 2017 co-valedictorians, triplets Case, Cole, and Katelyn Trevino, ushered in a moment of silence, followed by a solemn reading of the names of those who perished. The last event to take place in the auditorium was a question and answer session with second generation survivors. The session was moderated by Geneva Wiskemann, former state archivist and founder of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, and featured Michelle Allen, Susan Hagerman, and Jim Church. Both Allen's and Hagerman's fathers survived the bombings, as did Church's mother-in-law. They shared with the audience their relative's experience that day, the lasting effects they could see in them decades later, and with what amazing strength and fortitude that the Bath community came together to help each other – and still do. "Even today, that is what Bath is all about – everyone comes together and helps when there's a need," Hagerman said. "And, we're all very close – one of the advantages of having a small community. Everyone cares for everybody else."[580]

Those who wished to attend the final happening of the evening walked across the street to James Couzens Memorial Park, the original home of Bath Consolidated School. Here, people gathered for a candlelight vigil honoring the dead. Chairs, lined in blue silk, were positioned in long rows, each donning the name of a deceased victim. The cool winds made it impossible for the candles to hold fire, but that did not stop attendees from volunteering one-by-one to read aloud the names of those long lost.

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[579] Matt Martyn, "90th commemoration of Bath School disaster," (Bath Middle School, Bath, Michigan, May 18, 2017.)

[580] Susan Hagerman, "90th commemoration of Bath School disaster," (Bath Middle School, Bath, Michigan, May 18, 2017.)

Figure 35: Chairs lined in blue silk featuring names of the deceased are laid out in James Couzens Memorial Park on the evening of May 18, 2017. The candlelight vigil service held here concluded the ninetieth anniversary commemoration event. Photo taken by author.

Books and a Play

While *Bath Massacre: America's First School Bombing,* a book published in 2009 by Arnie Bernstein, is arguably the most well-known, local Bath residents have written other books about the disaster. This began directly after the bombings with Monty Ellsworth's 1927 self-published work – *The Bath School Disaster*. It is now considered a rare book, as not many copies remain, and those that do are treasured by families who have kept them for decades. Assuming there would be a tourist demand for information on the disaster, Ellsworth went to work quickly, documenting all victims, both dead and injured, with photographs, biographies, and details of injuries. The book did not achieve high sales. Try as he might, Ellsworth rushed the book into production a little too late to catch the bulk of the tourism that flocked to Bath, and he did not make an extensive effort to market it on a national scale.[581]

Ellsworth's book, however, proved a success in another way. Ending up with many books on hand, he donated one to every family he interviewed – each family who was grieving a dead or injured child. Author Grant Parker described the long-term impact of *The Bath School Disaster* within his own book, *Mayday: The History of a Village Holocaust*:

> Before any reminiscences about Bath get very far, the "book" is brought out for reference or for pride – and always with love. The copies are old in appearance, most of them. They've been used, and used, and used again – a vehicle for a trip back to a lost child, a remembered classmate, a revered teacher, another time. The bindings are loose from wear now, the pages yellowed and tattered, and mended with Scotch tape.[582]

Parker notes that as a former saloon keeper, butcher, and small-town merchant, Ellsworth was an unlikely healer or hero. Still, in an era in which ongoing counseling or therapy in response to trauma was almost unheard of, his book served a therapeutic role. With his extensive interviewing,

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[581] Grant Parker, *Mayday: The History of a Village Holocaust*. Lansing: Liberty Press, 1980, 221.
[582] Ibid., 222.

the featuring and highlighting of each child, and in the fact that he brought all of this to publication, Ellsworth ultimately became an important source of healing and grief therapy for parents and loved ones.[583]

Decades later, in the late 1970s, local social worker Grant Parker began to interview survivors. A newcomer to Bath then, he was concerned that, even 50 years later, the topic of the disaster might be too painful to discuss. With the help of a few survivors, though, he was able to break through to other survivors.[584] The result was *Mayday: The History of a Village Holocaust,* published in 1980. In addition to explaining the Bath disaster in great detail, the book offers a professional analysis of Kehoe – a social worker's perspective. Parker remained concerned about victims of the Bath disaster up until his death in 2014 at the age of 89. It was important to him that all children were properly memorialized so that future Bath generations would know of them.[585]

In 2002, Bath historian and Bath School Museum co-founder Gene Wilkins published *My Scrapbook on the Bath School Bombing of May 18, 1927*.[586] Here, Wilkins merged survivor interviews with many photographs, some of which had never been published.[587] He worked throughout his life to preserve the memory of those lost during the disaster, leading the efforts in getting the deceased memorialized in James Couzens Memorial Park and in helping the park achieve historical site status. Upon his death in 2013, his wish was for donations to be given to the Bath School Museum, in lieu of flowers.[588]

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[583] Ibid., 222.
[584] Ibid., Acknowledgements.

[585] Mary Jo White, "Grant Parker, author of book on Bath School bombing, dies at 89," *The Lansing State Journal*, December 7, 2014, 1.
[586] Sally Trout, "Bath plans memorial to victims of 1927 school disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, November 25, 1989; "Community Briefs," *The Lansing State Journal*, March 7, 2003, B3.
[587] Gene Wilkins, *My Scrapbook on the Bath School Bombing of May 18, 1927 with many never before published photographs, stories, and survivors' quotes* (Bath: Timber Wolf LTD, 2002).
[588] "Obituary of Gene Wilkins," *The Lansing State Journal*, December 22, 2013.

Betty Spencer chose to write about the Bath tragedy from an entirely different perspective when she published *Life is Fragile: One Girl's Look at the Bath School Disaster* in 2007. Written for an audience between the ages of 10 and 12, the book is historical fiction and tells the story through the eyes of a child who experienced it. Spencer, a Mt. Pleasant, Michigan resident, learned of the disaster from her daughter, who was working in the Bath School system. Her grandchildren were also students there. She wrote the book, "not to frighten children, but to make them more aware of their own mortality."[589]

Spencer's book is still used in Bath's schools to help children fully comprehend the disaster. In one 7th grade language arts class, students read the book and pull quotes from it in order to form questions. They then research these questions and create a website featuring their findings about the bombings. The students also visit the Bath School Museum, watch videos about the disaster, and read excerpts from Bernstein's *Bath Massacre* and Parker's *Mayday*.[590] Similarly, in one Bath High School English class, students read excerpts from *Mayday* and Ellsworth's *The Bath School Disaster*, visit the museum and memorial park, and watch documentaries.[591] In both cases, the focus of discussion is upon what possibly caused the bombings – what factors could have led Kehoe to formulate such grisly plans.[592]

The disaster also inspired a play, called *An Act of Madness: The Bath School Bombing*. It was originally performed by Everett High School students in Lansing as part of the Michigan Interscholastic Forensic Association's (MIFA's) 2003-2004 performing arts season. Written by Jane Falion and Jeffrey Nash, it was performed as a "multiple," a play made up of only three to eight

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[589] Greg Nelson, "Children's book deals with school disaster," *The Morning Sun*, May 12, 2008, 1-2.
[590] Jordan Parks (English teacher at Bath Middle School), "E-mail Interview with author," May 14, 2018.
[591] Maryanne Boylan (English teacher at Bath High School), "E-mail Interview with author," May 1, 2018.
[592] Maryanne Boylan (English teacher at Bath High School), "E-mail Interview with author," May 1, 2018; Jordan Parks (English teacher at Bath Middle School), "E-mail Interview with author," May 14, 2018.

actors, and no set beyond stools, boxes, and chairs. There are no lights, props, sounds, or special costumes. It is highly stylized, swift, and limited to 15 minutes or less. Falion, an Okemos, Michigan resident, learned of the Bath disaster in the 1990s after picking up a copy of Parker's *Mayday*. She became captivated with the story and researched it extensively, eventually resulting in she approaching Nash with the idea of writing the script. Falion's only regret after the play's original performance on MIFA's competitive stage was that it was not performed publicly, and not specifically for the citizens of Bath.[593]

This regret was remedied in 2009 when the play was performed at the third annual Renegade Theatre Festival in Lansing. For this production, Falion amplified the performance, pushing it to 18 minutes long.[594] And, while Lansing is in close proximity to Bath, she still aimed for the production to be performed within the township itself. On September 15, 2009, *An Act of Madness: The Bath School Bombing* came to Bath United Methodist Church, a structure which suffered its own damage on May 18, 1927. A television camera crew covered the event, and local response to the performance was overwhelmingly positive, so much so that the ensemble was invited to perform the play again the following year at the church during the annual "Bath Days" community event.[595]

Memory

At the opposite end of collective memory is collective silence, a silence which can hinder public memory enough to evolve into a kind of collective amnesia. An event is remembered by individuals, but escapes widespread memory. Memories, after all, have to be prepared, planned, and

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[593] *An Act of Madness: The Bath School Bombing*, production program, written by Jane Falion and Jeffrey Nash, dir. Jane Falion, Riverwalk Theatre, Lansing, MI, August 20-22, 2009. Program courtesy of Johanna Balzer.

[594] Dawn Parker, "Play features story of Bath school bombing," *The Lansing State Journal*, August 16, 2009.
[595] Dawn Parker, "Bath Days events to commemorate school bombing," *The Lansing State Journal*, August 1, 2010; Brad Ritter, "Ensemble depicts Bath school disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, September 20, 2009.

rehearsed both individually and socially.[596] They have to be created. In Bath, many of the survivors individually solidified their memories of the disaster, as trauma would not allow them to forget, but these memories were not rehearsed socially for decades. Schudson notes that, "The past that comes to be known best or known at all is not only the one made into stories; it is the one *made* at all, rather than the one experienced without being specifically constructed."[597] This is the process of conventionalization. Simply put, the past becomes knowable.[598] Without people working to construct and shape a certain memory for public consumption, a memory can fade and fail to reach significant public remembrance. For a very long time, memory of the Bath disaster escaped conventionalization. The silence of individual survivors created an atmosphere of collective forgetting.

Events that are attended to by powerful social entities and organizations are likely to be better preserved in the public's eye, as are materials that are archived or recorded well. As Schudson states, "Culturally valued and memorialized activities are more easily retrievable than culturally denigrated, repressed, or stigmatized activities. Whatever past is remembered or commemorated, it must be drawn from the available past; and availability of the past is socially structured."[599] For years, memory of the disaster was socially suppressed in Bath – not spoken of outside of close friends or family. The "available past" during this time had almost nothing within it representing the Bath disaster. As such, collective memory struggled to take hold after the initial splurge of media coverage in May of 1927.

This changed at the fiftieth anniversary commemoration, and collective memory of the disaster continued to grow in 1984 with the creation of the Bath School Museum. Through the years,

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[596] Schudson, 358.
[597] Ibid.
[598] Ibid.
[599] Schudson, 359.

it has evolved further, as future generations add their own interpretations and conceptions of the tragedy to current beliefs. These efforts though, being largely local, have not permeated national memory. Active re-working of the past, a significant change in collective memory, is more likely to happen if the institution working within the memory is well-known on a large scale. If memorial efforts are more localized, an effect on national memory is less likely to occur.[600]

The commemoration efforts that began in 1977 and continue through to present day, while powerful and meaningful, have done little to break into national collective memory. National media do not cover these events. And, while some mainstream media do cite the Bath disaster in times of modern school violence, it is a seldom occurrence and one likely not given prominent media placement; it is therefore also not effectual within national memory. Perhaps this is for the best, as what survivors preferred in 1927 was the chance to heal and mourn in peace. In present day too, there is a sense of steadfast determination within the disaster's memorial events – a feeling that the citizens of Bath can get through anything, solely with the help of one another.

[600] Ibid.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION

Memory

The bombings and murders that occurred in the small farming township of Bath, Michigan, did not become a permanent benchmark in the memory of the American people. Though his crime was horrific, Andrew Kehoe did not gain notoriety as one of this nation's worst mass murderers. There is no widespread or national recognition of the disaster's anniversary annually on May 18. Even in Michigan, with the exception of the local region, most longtime residents have never even heard of what happened. As Steven Biel points out in his research on the memory of the *Titanic* disaster, one way to examine an event is through the angle of other events occurring at the same time. This synchronicity, or simultaneity, may or may not imply a deeper meaning, but there is value in that each is a snapshot taken of the same moment in time, albeit from different viewpoints.[601] The bombing of Bath Consolidated School by Andrew P. Kehoe (May 18, 1927) and the first-ever solo airplane flight across the Atlantic Ocean by Charles A. Lindbergh (May 21, 1927) can be considered in such a manner.

While certainly not the only influence, media play a large role in marking an event as historically and nationally significant. The question of whether or not the press in 1927 did "enough" for the Bath disaster to be marked as such is a valid one. While the bombings received two days of moderate national coverage, the tsunami of newspaper coverage that Charles Lindbergh's flight

[601] Steven Biel, *Down with the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 9.

received was unprecedented. Before leaving for Paris, Lindbergh instructed Walter Hyams & Co., a New York clipping agency, to mail any newspaper clippings about his flight to his mother.[602] Two days later, the story had garnered a whopping 27,000 columns of newspaper space, resulting in more than 300,000 clippings sent to Mrs. Lindbergh. In comparison, the death of President Woodrow Wilson in 1924 resulted in 80,000 clippings, and the Lindbergh story even surpassed coverage of the discovery of the North Pole in 1909. It was by far the highest level of clippings that Hyams & Co. had ever handled.[603]

Calling Lindbergh "the pet of the world," the *Lansing Capital News* exclaimed, "What could be more interesting reading these days than the story of the life and high adventure of Captain Charles A. Lindbergh?"[604] The American public seemed to agree; by Sunday morning, May 22, the vast majority of newspaper stands in New York City had sold out of all copies by 11 a.m.[605] In the coming days, journalists reported on every angle of Lindbergh's life and journey. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* even asked a facial analyst to examine Lindbergh's facial features for attributes. Qualities such as endurance, friendship, and a love of liberty were reported.[606] The *Youngstown Telegram* requested a psychologist detail just what makes a hero, and how Lindbergh personified this – traits such as bravery, loyalty, self-confidence, and kindness emerged.[607] Editorial writers admired his brave feat, while at the same time noting his sense of being the "typical American" and a member of the "common folk" – his simplicity and modesty adding even more to his hero appeal.[608]

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[602] "Wanted clippings, he gets volumes," *Lansing Capital News*, May 23, 1927, 1.
[603] "Here is one more record for his list: Newspaper space devoted to Lindbergh eclipses previous marks," *Detroit Free Press*, May 23, 1927, 8.
[604] "The life story of Lindbergh," *Lansing Capital News*, May 28, 1927, 1.
[605] "Lindbergh story is eagerly read," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 23, 1927, 2.
[606] J.O. Abernethy, "Courage, love of liberty marked in flyer's face," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 23, 1927, 5.
[607] Gilbert Patton, "What they are attracts most: Expert explains qualities that make heroes," *Youngstown Telegram*, May 19, 1927.
[608] "Lindbergh, Envoy Extraordinary," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, May 26, 1927, Editorial Page; "Looking after Lindbergh," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, May 31, 1927, Editorial Page.

Mayday author Grant Parker wrote of the cultural climate in America during the week prior to the school bombing and Lindbergh's successful voyage, noting that 1927 was the ultimate "time of the hero." Americans at the time needed, sought out, created, and worshipped heroes. In swimming, Johnny Weissmuller was shattering records. Jack Sharkey, Jack Dempsey, and Gene Tunney were making the great golden age of boxing. In baseball, Babe Ruth was in his prime. The biggest hero of them all though, Parker notes, was yet to accomplish his feat. He states:

> Captain Charles Lindbergh was scheduled to try his great solo flight across the Atlantic the following week. Something in his manner, something in his smile, something in his courage, combined to make him the great household word long before takeoff. Newspapers across the land were becoming little more than Lindbergh chroniclers. Kehoe, with his love of the magic of machines, might ordinarily have been more excited by the unfolding Lindbergh drama than anyone. Instead, all of Kehoe's interest and energies were now devoted to accomplishing his own all-consuming objective.[609]

Lindbergh's flight was the symbolic achievement of the time, not only because of the technological feat, but also because his fellow Americans saw in him the best of the country's past as well as a hopeful view of America's future. Charles Shindo, author of *1927 and the Rise of Modern America*, states of the event:

> Lindbergh, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, and the trans-Atlantic flight were more than just a person, a machine, and an event. They were each symbols of the age, as well as important symbols of the past and future. For Americans in 1927, Lindbergh embodied the best American virtues and values, whether individuality, self-reliance, and courage, or cooperation and a belief in progress or technology.[610]

Shindo goes on to say that Lindbergh's achievement became "all things to all people," bringing all Americans together in mass celebration, regardless of age, gender, class or race.[611]

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[609] Grant Parker, *Mayday: The History of a Village Holocaust* (Lansing: Liberty Press, 1980), 95-96.
[610] Charles L. Shindo, *1927 and the Rise of Modern America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 4.
[611] Ibid., 5.

When one considers the profound national and cultural impact of the trans-Atlantic crossing, it is easy to understand why the Bath Consolidated School bombing dropped in national coverage as soon as Lindbergh took to the sky. Journalists ultimately aim to tell a story that captures the public's interest, and they do so by crafting a narrative which resonates with cultural beliefs and assumptions.[612] To make the story even more meaningful, a suitable character or human face is key.[613] In Charles Lindbergh, the press found a nearly perfect key character. This, combined with a culture at the cusp of technological advance and pining for heroes, made the Lindbergh flight into the defining story of the era, and Lindbergh himself into the face of American progress and prowess.

The Bath disaster, while having key characters and surely many heroes, did not fit neatly into cultural beliefs at the time. There was no preceding press narrative for school shootings or bombings. It seemed an anomaly. The mass media's lack of ongoing interest in the Bath disaster, coupled with disaster survivors' preference for silence, caused the tragedy to fade from national public discussion and, as the months and years past, soon too from collective memory. It is also possible that the disaster's geographic location, away from many of the major metropolitan areas, had an effect on media coverage at the time and later too upon its collective memory.

Leavy and Maloney, in comparing the 1999 Columbine High School shooting to the 2005 Red Lake Senior High School shooting, discuss how the press can mark an event as historically significant, and therefore pushed into collective memory. Ways of doing so include granting the story heavy coverage, using superlatives such as "massacre" or "terror," and having a human interest angle focusing on victims, survivors, heroes, and villains.[614] While the Bath disaster received coverage which utilized superlatives and was told as a tale of heroism and sacrifice with individual

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[612] Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
[613] Patricia Leavy and Kathryn Maloney, "American reporting of school violence and 'people like us': A comparison of newspaper coverage of the Columbine and Red Lake School Shootings," *Critical Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2009): 277.
[614] Leavy and Maloney, 288.

focus on tiny victims, this was ultimately not enough to mark the tragedy historically significant. The short extent of coverage and the impact of simultaneity of coverage with that of the Lindbergh flight proved too great.

Another reason that we do not collectively remember the Bath disaster or Andrew Kehoe lies in the nature of media in the 1920s versus today. The tragedy occurred in a time well before television, the Internet, social media, and 24-hour news channels. Today, sociologists point out that while violent crime in general is down, the public's exposure to what violence does occur has grown exponentially through the decades.[615] Through media exposure and pop culture, people have become more aware than ever of the violence that happens in America. While Kehoe is forgotten, Charles Whitman, who murdered 15 people at the University of Texas at Austin in 1966, is dubbed the "Texas Tower Sniper" and is remembered as one of the worst mass murderers of all time. Whitman was even played by Kurt Russell in the 1975 made-for-TV movie, *The Deadly Tower*.[616]

Today, with live feeds possible by anyone via social media and cell phones, everyone is an eyewitness in a sense. After the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, state senator Dan Liljenquist called this phenomenon, "the blessing and burden of the digital age."[617] As columnist Richard Roeper noted after the Virginia Tech murders, in modern society, people have a multitude of ways to hold a mirror to themselves.[618] Newspapers and radio, while still functioning as societal mirrors in 1927, lacked the staying power of our modern media. They were fleeting, in a sense – gone when thrown away, or gone as the radio voices faded. There were no images or videos to follow people via

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[615] Paul Johnson, "Exposure to mass violence has increased," *The Thomasville Times*, December 20, 2012, 11.
[616] Steve Lambert, "Carnage can't tell us much," *The Sun*, April 22, 2007.
[617] Dan Liljenquist, "How people react to evil offers hope for mankind," *Deseret Morning News*, April 18, 2013.
[618] Richard Roeper, "Does current generation have it worse? Some seem to think so, but media's glare can distort," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 25, 2007.

cell phone, television, tablet, or computer. The pervasiveness of modern media can serve as a potent reminder of an event or news story.

Time reporter Katrina Gulliver offers an additional reason why Kehoe was forgotten and why the Bath disaster is routinely left out of published accounts of U.S. terrorism – Kehoe did not fit the mold of what people thought a "terrorist" was in the 1920s. Americans at that time feared anarchists, who were seen by the public as shady foreigners.[619] A prime example is the 1921 trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italian-born American anarchists, who were controversially convicted of the murder of two people during an armed robbery which occurred in April of 1920. In April of 1927, their final appeal was rejected, and the two were sentenced to death.[620]

Kehoe, who committed his crime one month later, was a white man in a small, rural town – not at all what people envisioned of a terrorist. Gulliver points out that, today, we might view Kehoe within the continuum of angry, white, male murderers such as Timothy McVeigh or Dylann Roof. In the 1920s, however, this was not a commonly known profile and not part of most Americans' perception of criminality.[621] And, while murder trials drew great press at the time, Kehoe ending his own life left no chance for further media attention at the time of trial or execution.

Of course, even if media coverage had been stronger and persisted over time, this would not mitigate the great effect that survivor silence had upon collective memory of the Bath disaster. This silence delayed public commemoration for decades, further lessening the likelihood of national memory. It also shows that, for journalists, it can be challenging to get first-hand accounts from those who have experienced traumatic events. Carolyn Kitch notes this in her research of World War II veterans, a group who was reluctant to speak of their war experiences for six decades. In May

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[619] Katrina Gulliver, "Why we have forgotten the worst school attack in U.S. history," September 15, 2016, Accessed November 3, 2017, http://time.com/4492872/kehoe-attack-history.
[620] Felix Frankfurter, "The case of Sacco and Vanzetti," *The Atlantic*, March 1927.
[621] Gulliver, http://time.com/4492872/kehoe-attack-history.

2004, as the dedication of the National World War II Memorial grew closer, media began to question these now elderly men and women. And, perhaps because they were soon facing their own mortality, they talked. Media outlets dubbed them "the disappearing generation" and a "dwindling band of brothers."[622]

Though these veterans were asked about their own stories, almost all spoke of their fallen comrades. One veteran shared his memories with a CBS reporter in order to honor "all the fellows that went on before me."[623] They also spoke of atrocities experienced by those so young. One gentleman who was interviewed by NBC's *Today* show cried on air, as he said, "We saw a lot of death, and we were 18 years old."[624] Stories like this confirmed why the "silent generation," as they were called, stayed silent for so long. Al Simpson told CNN, "There is not much good about war. I myself have never talked to my children about the war, because it is… I put it way back here, those things I want to forget."[625] Simpson's comments echo those of Bath's survivors. Many of their children never knew exactly what their parents endured at school in 1927 until well into adulthood.

Psychiatrist Onno van der Hart notes that traumatic memory, unlike ordinary memory, is a solitary activity that "has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody."[626] He states that it is only for convenience that we even call it a "memory," as the person is often incapable of sharing the necessary narrative with others that would produce something that could be deemed an expressed memory. The individuals often struggle to reconcile the inner turmoil of emotions that emerge.[627] Trauma has a way of silencing itself within survivors. When it returns in the form of nightmares or

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[622] Carolyn Kitch, "'All the fellows that went on before me': Tribute, memory, and counter-memory among veterans of 'the Good War,'" In *Journalism in a Culture of Grief*, by Carolyn Kitch and Janice Hume (New York: Routledge, 2008), 171.
[623] Kitch, 170.
[624] Kitch, 175-176.
[625] Kitch, 176.
[626] B.A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The flexibility of memory and the engraving of trauma," *American Imago* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 431.
[627] Cathy Caruth, *Listening to Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 168.

flashbacks brought on by an environmental stimulus, even at these times, it is quite often a struggle that remains internal.[628] In the case of both World War II veterans and Bath's survivors, traumatic memory remained publicly elusive for decades. It was something many took to their grave. For others, they began to speak when they realized that they were the last opportunity for anyone to do so.

Violence

The few mass killings that occurred in schools in the 1800s produced very little media coverage. Often coverage was no more than a paragraph long, and not featured on the front page. Even when stories happened to make the front page, they were not prominently placed, nor of a substantial length. Most were not covered in national newspapers, but some were covered regionally.[629]

Mass killings in schools continued into the early 1900s. In 1913, Manuel Fernandez began shooting at a Honolulu, Hawaii, school, murdering one and injuring seven. In Valdosta, Georgia, shooter John Glover murdered two students at a schoolhouse in 1922; he was then killed by a retaliating mob. Universities too experienced shootings during this time. In August of 1919, Roger Sprague, an employee of the University of California's chemistry department, began shooting, wounding two professors. He attempted to shoot the school's vice president but was taken down by police. Victor Koussow murdered the associate dean of a dental school and another professor in New York City in 1935, before taking his own life.[630] Even the peaceful 1950s had an incident of school violence. On May 4, 1956, 15-year-old Billy Prevatte began firing a rifle at Maryland Park Junior High School near Washington, DC. While his target was the principal, he never found him but did

[628] Caruth, 167.
[629] Schildkraut and Elsass, 31.
[630] Schildkraut and Elsass, 32-33.

kill one teacher and injure two more. Construction workers apprehended him while fleeing the school.[631]

Shootings occurring in the early-to-mid twentieth century were more likely to produce noticeable coverage within newspapers, such as that of front page placement. Even so, the perceived newsworthiness of the event played a part, with the more sensationalistic stories getting the most attention. Yet, even stories with sensationalistic features like prime location or high death toll were not a guarantee of preferred placement or extensive attention.[632]

What these and other early incidents show is that school violence was not born with Andrew Kehoe and his plans to destroy the township of Bath, Michigan. Nor did it end with this tragedy. The United States continues to grapple with how to handle the threat of school shootings and bombings. While mass killings are not new, the level of media attention we grant them has increased exponentially. This is in part due to media's tendency to intensely cover high-profile events, beginning with the Columbine shooting of 1999, but it is also due to the technological advances of our modern era. News organizations have had to adjust their delivery of the news to account for the public's ability to download information instantly on computers, tablets, and smartphones. Consumers of news can now share articles and information via their own social media outlets, further increasing the reach of news stories. Schildkraut and Elsass point out that mass shooters have also begun to produce multimedia manifestos, and these manifestos are even received and celebrated by online fan communities within social media.[633]

If one applies the tenets of modern research of media coverage of violence to the Bath disaster of 1927, most signs point to the disaster receiving enough coverage to become well-known

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[631] "One teacher killed, two wounded when youth goes on gun rampage," *Madera Daily News-Tribune*, May 5, 1956, 1.
[632] Schildkraut and Elsass, 33.
[633] Schildkraut and Elsass, 140.

collectively. In applying Chermak's criteria for crime newsworthiness, the characteristics of the Bath tragedy should have produced high levels of sustained coverage. It had a high level of violence and brutality toward an exceptionally "worthy" subset of victims – children simply trying to enjoy their last week of school.[634] Bath's children surely fit into Sorenson, Manz, and Berk's criteria for "worthy" victims – white in the youngest age group.[635] It was a highly unique and unusual event, the likes of which society had not seen before. And, it had an unusually high death toll with an uncommon method of destruction – the painstaking placement of dynamite electrically linked to an alarm clock timing device, and all this done by a single man.[636] Yet, none of these compelling characteristics caused the Bath disaster to last more than a few days in national media coverage.

While the answer to why is complex, the era in which the disaster occurred played a large part. Journalism, being a product of its time and place, works to fulfill the needs of the particular public that it serves. The conceptions of what was newsworthy, whether in crime or otherwise, was different in 1927. It is clear that the newspapers deemed the Bath disaster newsworthy, but it was fleeting coverage. The fact that the Lindbergh story soon reigned supreme uniformly across all national media outlets says that the needs and wants of the public at that time were more in line with that story – a tale of hope, technological advancement, and human and American triumph. The Bath disaster, being on the opposite end of this spectrum, might have better served the public by being shared and then quickly filed away into archives.

Walter Lippman said in 1927 that what the public desired most were news stories involving elements of mystery, love, and death – even murder. He, along with other era commentators, warned though that such stories must be well-timed, because the public could not focus on two significant

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[634] Steven Chermak, *Victims in the News: Crime and the American News Media* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).
[635] Susan Sorenson, Julie Manz, and Richard Berk, "News media coverage and the epidemiology of homicide," *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 10 (1998): 1510-1514.
[636] Steven Chermak, *Victims in the News: Crime and the American News Media* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

stories simultaneously.[637] Arguably, both the Lindbergh story and that of the Bath disaster had elements of mystery, love, and death, but perhaps Bath's tragedy presented an excessive and unprecedented level of death, trauma, and grief. The elation and excitement brought on by Lindbergh's accomplishment proved victorious in the eyes of the press and the public.

In addition, media at that time did not see the Bath tragedy as another line of story within the narrative of mass killings and shootings. There was no such broader narrative at that time. There was no previous socially constructed moral panic that could be then be reactivated and applied within coverage. The public then as well was not looking for another story to consume that fell into this same narrative. The murders in Bath seemed an anomaly, and they were given the press treatment that seemed fitting for something so odd and impermanent. Media frames impact discussion by setting the vocabulary and metaphors through which people comprehend an event. The Bath disaster was given an extremely low level of national press attention. This coupled with the fact that there was virtually no preceding vocabulary or metaphors for media to look back upon, meant that the public discussion generated was scattered, unfocused, and brief.

This low level of national media attention was soon followed by unwavering survivor silence, so much so that even when similar events did occur in the years to follow, the Bath disaster did not make it into the press narrative then either. It would be decades before it would, even to a small extent. By then, collective memory of school shootings and murders had solidified in its evolution, and the Bath disaster was not included within it.

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[637] Walter Lippman, "Blazing publicity: Why we know so much about 'Peaches' Browning, Valentino, Lindbergh, and Queen Marie," in *Vanity Fair: Selections from America's most memorable magazine; A cavalcade of the 1920s and 1930s,* ed. Cleveland Amory and Frederick Bradlee (New York: Viking, 1960), 121.

Future Research

Future research might analyze other mass killings and/or school shootings that also resulted in a high death toll, or exhibited other tenets of newsworthiness, yet have been largely forgotten collectively. In addition, a future scholar could examine an event that garnered extensive national media attention and earned a place in current collective memory to see if this memory holds firm decades later. The Columbine High School shooting is an obvious candidate for this type of research.

While not nearly the deadliest American school shooting, it is still the most publicly well-known. After a significant time period has elapsed, there is an opportunity for a scholar to look back to 1999 and see how media of then portrayed the event locally, regionally, and nationally, and how memory of Columbine is portrayed in current day media. He or she is ultimately trying to ascertain what it is about the shooting itself and era media's extensive coverage of it that contributes to present-day collective memory, and what memory processes might be at play within collective memory of this tragedy. The Columbine shooting indeed earned the complete and ongoing attention of American media and citizenry at its occurrence, and it continues to do so today. A future study could seek to understand what level of impact such coverage and widespread recognition holds decades later.

Epilogue

Standing today at the site of the blasts, in the quaint and lovely James Couzens Memorial Park, it is hard to envision the death, destruction, and grief that struck nearly 100 years ago. The land itself does not seem to remember, although one can still stumble upon pieces of cement foundation just under the green grass. Bath, while still a small township, is increasingly becoming a suburb of Lansing. More and more families are new to the area, and this means that an increasingly smaller

percentage of people have relatives who experienced the disaster. One Bath resident told a *Lansing State Journal* reporter in 2012 that there are even some people living in Bath who do not know of the school disaster.[638] The second-generation survivors are growing older, and their children did not have the same first-hand experience of the disaster's effects. Without the park's historical marker detailing Kehoe's crime, its bricks and plaques inscribed with the names of the dead, and its bright white and red cupola, accessible public memorialization of the tragedy might be lost; other disaster artifacts are tucked away in the museum within Bath Middle School.

Such a large percentage of disaster victims were children. Thirty-nine young lives who had only just begun to establish themselves, to refine their personalities, to decide upon which professions they think they want to be when they grow up.[639] So many unfinished stories gone so quickly and all at once – posing a challenge for memory in any situation. Bath's children, however, perished in an event largely forgotten, and hence their smaller stories within the larger tale, are lost even more. How do we as a society measure violence? Researchers note high death toll and unusual tactics of brutality as markers of substantial violence. In studying an event like the Bath disaster, however, one realizes that violence does not lend itself easily to accurate measurement. It is much greater than anything we can place a quantity upon. The currents of raw emotion that run silently underneath it are strong, and it is a torment that echoes through generations. In the following poem, Mrs. Owen Abbey of Lansing attempts to ease the pain of Bath's anguished parents.

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[638] Scott Dav, "Community wrestles with best way to commemorate Bath School disaster," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 20, 2012.
[639] Here in mentioning 39 children killed, I am including Richard Fritz.

"The Schoolhouse Blast,"
by Lansing poet, Mrs. Owen Abbey, 1927:

Those tiny hands are now at rest,
Those rosy cheeks we have caressed,
The moist red lips are now so still,
The babes we loved and always will.

No more we'll scold them for a fault,
For frivolous things that they have bought;
No more will hear that childish voice,
That made the parent hearts rejoice.

We didn't think when they left home,
No more those tiny feet would roam.
We didn't think that last goodbye,
Would linger till we met on high.

The loving hearts that now are quiet,
Their mischievous ways that caused a riot,
The way their clear eyes looked at us,
When we would scold and say they must.

The drums, the bats, and all the balls,
Playthings hung on every wall,
The dog that waits them at the gate,
No more will meet him when he's late.

No more we'll kiss him in the morn.
Think of the time when he was born.
How proud our hearts when Doc did say,
Let's see how much the new babe weighs?

Oh God, it seems so hard to let them go,
But still you must want them, we know.
We say, "God's will be done,"
And know they're gone with the setting sun.

Help those dear mothers and fathers, now so sad,
When it seems they've lost everything they had.
Cheer them, dear father, in your own way,
And show them the light to a brighter day.

Help them to look up and realize,
They have just begun brighter lives.
They'll help us from their own bright sphere,
And cheer us ever, year by year.

And when we too will leave this earth,
And have a new world hail our birth,
They'll be waiting there to welcome us,
And say through life, "In God we trust."[640]

[640] As quoted in: M.J. Ellsworth, *The Bath School Disaster* (Self-published, Bath: 1927), 62. This poem was also printed in *The Lansing State Journal* following the disaster.

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