

## **Seven School Children Killed in Bus Accident - October 6, 1949**

11/15/14 6:13 W, 1 I - + 5 - 6

From the disaster files. On Thursday morning, October 6, 1949, a school bus full of children and an ice truck collided in Nash County. Reported the *Raleigh Times* that day, the bus was "packed with children" when the two vehicles "crashed together" after a blind curve on a narrow wooden bridge. Six children were killed and fourteen were injured.

Some seventy pupils were aboard the bus, which had seats for forty-two. The collision ripped a "hold a yard square" on the driver's side. "Screaming children, books, and lunch baskets littered the swamp-bordered road side." The victims were identify as Judie Massey, Joanne Debnam, and Carolyn Debnam of Zebulon, Route 1; Jean Bryant of Zebulon, Route 3; and Robert Carter and Julian Bryant of Middlesex, Route 1.

The paper also reported that Bobby Lee Strickland, of Middlesex, Route 2, was in "very critical condition and expected to die." He passed away within the day. The injured included more children from Zebulon and Middlesex.

Most of the children were being transported to Ferrells Grammer School, about a mile from the accident site, and about thirty miles east of Raleigh. Families living in the neighborhood "picked up the injured and rushed them to doctors' offices and hospitals over a wide area."

The route was described as a "bad road with a narrow bridge" by the school principle. There was a blind curve approaching the bridge, with views obstructed by roadside grown. The following day's newspaper included photos of the road as drivers would see them.

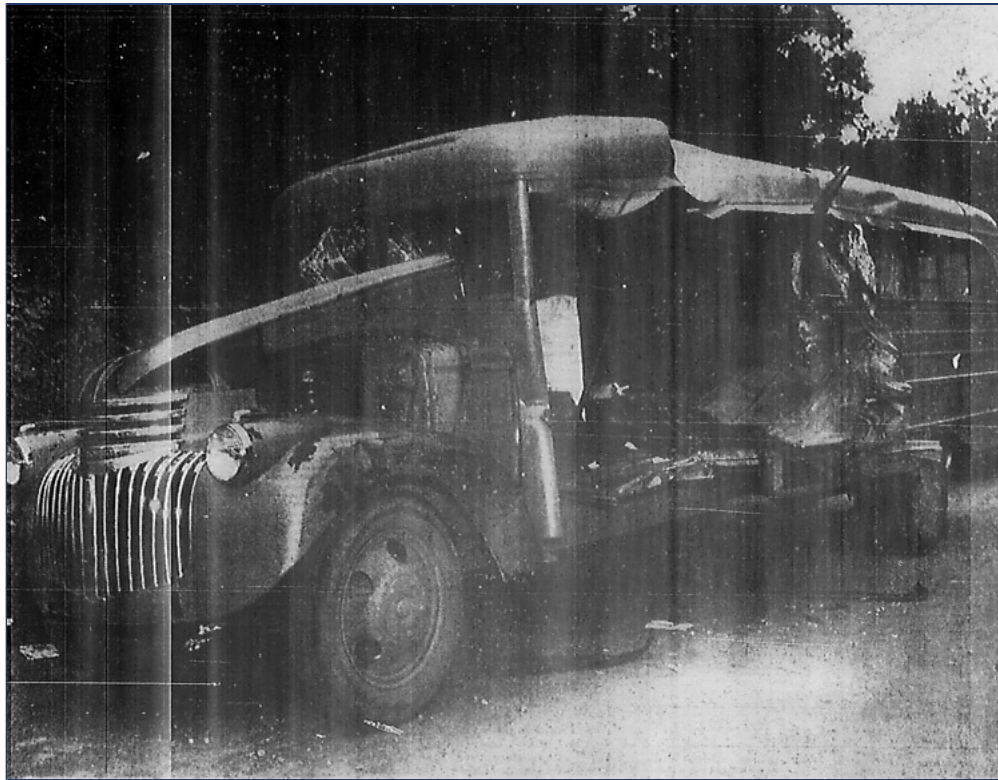
The ice truck had stopped at the bridge when the bus hit it. The bus was traveling an estimated 25 miles per hour. The impact ripped a nine-foot hole along the side, and sent the bus rolling 152 feet (backward?). There was a "two-foot, three-inch clearance" for the two vehicles to pass.

Many of the injured students were standing, and were thrown to the floor at the time of impact. The bus was overloaded due to a fleet shortage. The school was supposed to have four buses, but only three were operating. The newspaper reported that a coroner's inquest was planned for 10:00 a.m. the following day in Nashville. (He cleared both drivers but noted that highway and school officials were criminally negligent. The ice truck, by the way, was owned by the Zebulon Ice and Coal Company.)

The driver of the bus was a student. The front page of the *Raleigh Times* also included a short feature commending the safety record of the state's school-aged bus drivers. In another short article, the newspaper cited that thirty-five school children had died in bus accidents since 1933. The two worst each killed four students.

In November 1936, in Cumberland County, a bus collided with a freight van, killing four and injuring eighteen. On March 4, 1946, a school bus ran off a bridge in Franklin County, killing four and injuring ten or more.

The caption for this front page photo on October 6 was "BATTERED SCHOOL BUS AFTER TRAGIC ACCIDENT - Photo [below] was taken early Thursday morning shortly after this Nash County school bus had crashed into an ice truck on a bridge near Middlesex causing the deaths of six young school children and send at least 18 others to scattered hospitals with injuries, some of which were described by doctors as serious. The big gaping hole is shown in the side of the bus where it made impact with the truck as the two vehicles met on the bridge. It was one of the worst school bus accidents in the State's history." Click to slightly enlarge:



One of the worse ones I have heard of was the Snow Hill School Bus Collision that occurred on May 31, 1985, on US 13 near Shine in Greene County between Snow Hill and Goldsboro. Four vehicles were involved, including a school bus operated by the Greene County Schools. Six students and one of the drivers were killed. The remaining 24 persons in the accident suffered injuries ranging from minor to critical.

**car3550** - 11/15/14 - 20:49

@car3550, I remember that one. Seem like there was a fire involved, as well, in that MVC.

@Mike, I heard about this crash, as well as the Cumberland crash, when I took the School Bus Driver course as a rising junior at Enloe HS in 1974. Seems like a school bus-involved fatal MVC in Raleigh (on either Blount or Person St, as I recall), and a couple of others, were the driving force behind doing away with the teen age drivers during the late 70s-early 80s.

I wonder how the school buses of today would stand-up structurally to an MVC such as this one?

**DJ** - 11/15/14 - 22:38

My mother and other students ran to this wreck in 1949. She remembers it very well. She is still alive today at 82 and lives in Lizard Lick.

**Donna M** ([Email](#)) - 09/04/18 - 17:50

I remember the 1949 one. My Grandmother died Wednesday evening, April 17th, 2019. In the cemetery I came across a grave. 'Ronnie Ray Carter, He lost his life in School Bus Tragedy near Ferrell's school'. He was buried next to his two parents. Outliving your child is terrible, and I pray for his mother and father, which died in the 50s and 2004 respectively.

**Hi** - 04/21/19 - 02:51

Name: (real name preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

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Yes

No