



The Court Legacy

The Historical Society for the United States District Court
for the Eastern District of Michigan ©2013

Vol. XX, No. 1
February 2013

Revisiting the 1927 Bath School Disaster

© Samuel C. Damren and Betty R. Damren¹

President's Preface

Since this is an atypical article for The Court Legacy, it deserves atypical handling; thus, this President's Preface.

The article was submitted to the Editor early in 2012 and was respectfully rejected because of its lack of connection with the Eastern District of Michigan geographically, or the Court in particular.

After the murders in the Newtown, Connecticut school, I asked our editors to reconsider the article on the grounds that the significance of this kind of event is really not geographical. This outrageous tragedy occurred just north of Lansing, our State capital.

Samuel C. Damren, Treasurer of the Historical Society, and his mother, Betty R. Damren, collaborated on this article. Because of the timeliness of the subject, and because it represents the conscientious efforts of a distinguished member of our Bar, we are proud to present it to you in The Court Legacy.

Michael J. Lavoie, President

Introduction

It was a spring morning in May 1927. Girl with a Cat woke in a cool upstairs room that she shared with her sister. Her family lived on a farm three miles outside the Village of Bath, northeast of Lansing, in mid-Michigan. She was nine years old. Soon after awakening, Girl with a Cat ran downstairs in her yellow flannel nightie to dress by the warm stove. Her father had been up since 5:30 a.m., feeding the animals and milking the cows. Mother was in the kitchen making breakfast.

There was rainwater in the reservoir on the kitchen range for Girl with a Cat to wash up, and a washstand in a small room adjacent to the kitchen with a basin, washcloth, soap and towel. In the kitchen, there was a pail of "hard" water from the well and a "community" cup. Having washed, she ladled out a cup of water and went to the back porch to brush her

teeth with baking soda from the kitchen cupboard. While she did so, her dad walked by, on to the next of the never-ending tasks for a farmer. He smiled "Good Morning" and called her by her nickname.

Breakfast was hot oatmeal with brown sugar and milk and a cup of cocoa. From a seat in the kitchen, she listened to the young leaves rustle in a soft wind and watched the branches drift in a gentle sway. Breakfast finished, and now dressed, she picked up the family's house cat, a grey and white tabby, to wait for the other schoolchildren in the neighborhood so they could walk to the bus stop together. The big tabby lay with his head on her shoulder like an overgrown rag doll. He had been a young cat when she was born. The tabby would let her pull him and pick him up in ways that no one else in the family could ever get away with. He was her cat.

She heard the neighborhood children long before they arrived at the bus stop near her home. A clique of the boys teased one another, pointing fingers and throwing small clumps of dirt at each other in animated disagreement. To Girl with a Cat, their arguments always sounded the same no matter the subject. She called them the Bickering Boys, but not to their faces. She was in fourth grade. The Bickering Boys were in fifth and sixth.

Girl with a Cat especially enjoyed the end of the bus ride when her school came into sight. It was a Consolidated School constructed in 1922 from taxes raised by community bonds. It was the biggest building in Bath. Two new large wings of the school had been constructed around the original two-story school. The older grades were housed in the South Wing and Girl with a Cat looked forward to the day when she could attend class in the shiny new rooms. Shortly after 9:00 a.m., just after first bell, she was at her desk attentively listening to her teacher's assignments when the world went into slow motion. The floor beneath the classroom shot up in the air and she and her classmates were tossed toward the ceiling as it collapsed. After that terrible day, her father never again spoke her nickname. Forty-five people were killed that day in a community of less than three thousand. Thirty-eight of the victims were young children. Girl with a Cat was one of them.

**The Historical Society for the United States
District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan**

Established in 1992

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

President

Michael J. Lavoie

Vice President

Brian D. Figot

Secretary

Debra A. Geroux

Treasurer

Samuel C. Damren

Executive Director

Judith K. Christie

Hon. Terrence G. Berg

David G. Chardavoine

Hon. Avern Cohn

Thomas W. Cranmer

M. Ellen Dennis

David A. Gardey

Hon. Mark A. Goldsmith

Paula A. Hall

Alan C. Harnisch

Michael C. Leibson

Matthew J. Lund

John P. Mayer

Hon. Stephen J. Murphy, III

Gregory V. Murray

Jeffrey G. Raphelson

Jeffrey A. Sadowski

Matthew Schneider

Patrick G. Seyferth

Hon. Arthur J. Tarnow

I.W. Winsten

Advisor

David J. Weaver

THE COURT LEGACY

Co-Editors

John P. Mayer

M. Ellen Dennis

Published periodically by The Historical Society for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Office of the Clerk, Room 216, Theodore Levin United States Courthouse, Detroit, MI 48226-2797.

Membership benefits include the Newsletter, voting privileges, and the Annual Meeting. The Historical Society has extended the benefits of membership to members of the Eastern District of Michigan Chapter of the Federal Bar Association.

Papers are encouraged to be submitted to the Newsletter editor for consideration as MS Word (preferred) or WordPerfect documents to mayerjohn3373@yahoo.com or m.ellen.dennis@gmail.com.

The Court Legacy reserves copyright to authors of signed articles. Permission to reprint a signed article should be obtained directly from the author and *The Court Legacy* should be acknowledged in the reprint. Unsigned material may be reprinted without permission provided *The Court Legacy* is given credit.

The Bath School Disaster, as it became to be known, occurred on May 18, 1927. It was then, and remains today, the most horrific tragedy to occur in an American school. Although hundreds of pounds of pyrotol and dynamite had been rigged underneath the entire school, only the explosives under the older portion of the school ignited, destroying it and the North Wing. Had the entire load set off, both wings would have been reduced to rubble and all the school children and teachers would have been killed.

That was the intent of the bomber, Andrew Kehoe. He had opposed the construction of the school, and could not abide paying the property taxes required to retire the construction bonds. On the morning just before the charges under the school exploded, Andrew Kehoe started fires at his home and farm buildings. He then drove a short distance into town and killed himself and school principal Emory C. Huyck by setting off a final load of dynamite in his car. Adding to his ignominies, Kehoe was probably the first suicide car bomber. This article revisits the details of May 18, 1927, not from the perspective of Kehoe, but from the perspective of the dedicated and heroic Principal of the Bath Consolidated School: Emory E. Huyck.

* * *

On May 23-25, 1927, the coroner's inquest into the death of Emory Huyck was conducted by the County Prosecutor. There was no reason for delay. The facts as to who caused the bombing were not in dispute. Fifty-four witnesses were called. The published findings of the jury were concise.² The focus of the inquiry was on Andrew Kehoe, not Emory Huyck.

The jury found that in October 1925, Andrew Kehoe purchased five hundred pounds of pyrotol in Jackson, and stored it at his farm buildings. In late 1926, he purchased two boxes of Hercules 40% dynamite in Lansing. Shortly thereafter, having free access to the school as a result of his position as treasurer of the Bath School and as a part-time electrician for the school, Kehoe began placing the pyrotol in thirty-pound bags under the crawl space of the addition to the school. He also concealed stick pyrotol and the Hercules dynamite in the basement of the old portion of the school below the elementary classes. The explosives were connected by electric wires to alarm clocks and two "hot shot" batteries.

On May 18, 1927, Kehoe arrived at the school before it was in session and went to the basement of the old school where the batteries were located. He connected the batteries to the alarm clocks and left. When the alarms went off shortly after school began, the electric circuit between the batteries and the charges was completed and dynamite beneath the old section of the school exploded, destroying it and much of the North wing. Five hundred four pounds of pyrotol under the South Wing of the school did not discharge because the "hot shot" battery lacked sufficient strength to power the longer circuits connecting those explosives.

The jury further found that sometime between the evening of May 16 and the morning of the blast, Kehoe murdered his wife, Nellie Kehoe, at their farm. He placed her body in a hog chute near the farm buildings. On the morning of May 18, close to the time that the school blast occurred, Kehoe caused oil or gasoline that had been spread throughout the farm buildings and home to be ignited. As a result of the ensuing conflagration, Nellie Kehoe's body was burned beyond recognition along with all the farm buildings except the poultry house.

After the fires began at his farm and the explosion occurred at the school, Andrew Kehoe drove to Bath and circled around the Village for 15 to 20 minutes. According to witnesses, he then entered the Village from the south at a high rate of speed. Kehoe stopped his car in front of the school and called 32-year old Emory Huyck, the school superintendent, over to him. When Huyck arrived, Andrew Kehoe committed suicide and murdered Huyck by blowing up his car with another charge of dynamite. The explosion also killed several bystanders. Later accounts revealed that Huyck was in his office on the second floor of the South wing of the school when the blast occurred. As Carlton Hollister, a fifth grader, later learned, Huyck picked him up, unconscious and injured, and carried him outside of the school to the safety of a "community switchboard" located across the street. He not only intended to rescue Hollister but to make sure that calls immediately went out to fire, police and hospitals. After delivering Hollister to safety, Huyck returned to the school and minutes later to his fatal encounter with Kehoe.³ Of the forty-four individuals murdered that day, thirty-eight were school children. The jury concluded their report with a specific finding that Andrew Kehoe "was sane at all times, and so conducted himself and concealed his operations that there was no cause to suspicion of the above acts." This statement emphasized something important to the jury that was put in issue by press reports and editorials published in the immediate aftermath of the Bath School Bombing. On May 19, 1927, the Clinton County Republican-News editorialized that Andrew Kehoe's actions were the work of a madman. The editors stated that "according to people of Bath,"

Andrew Kehoe has long been opposed to the township agricultural school in the village. He fought its establishment. He fought the expenses of operating it. He was a leader of those who were opposed to the higher taxes it imposed upon the community and township. Because of his activity and the leadership he fell heir to, he became radical and most unreasonable on this subject. Being heavily in debt on his farm the added taxes contributed to his loss of the farm to a mortgage this spring. Evidently, this was the last straw. Andrew Kehoe became a maniac by the increases in school taxes that caused him to lose his farm to foreclosure in the spring of 1927.⁴

Exactly which members of the Bath community these editors might have spoken to the day before to garner this consensus is suspect. The community was reeling from the tragedy. The editorial was false in two respects: first, Andrew Kehoe was not insane; and second, Andrew Kehoe did not lose his farm to a mortgage in the spring. Both of these assertions were subjects of the coroner's inquest.

Available historical and legal records establish that Andrew Kehoe did not lose his farm to foreclosure. The record also establishes that he was never in financial danger of losing his property as a result of increased property taxes to support the construction of the Bath Consolidated School. Kehoe's supposed financial distress was a ruse that he used to gain political support for his opposition to the construction of a Consolidated School. Kehoe's wife, Nellie, was the niece of Lawrence Price, the President of the REO car company in Lansing that he founded with R.E. Olds after Olds sold his stock in the Oldsmobile Company. Price was a man of considerable wealth and generosity. In fact, prior to his death, he donated the funds for the construction of Sparrow Hospital in Lansing where many of the victims of the Bath School Disaster were carried for emergency care. Price was much more than a successful auto pioneer and philanthropist. He was a war hero in the Civil War, having served with the New York Light Artillery in the battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg.

The Kehoes purchased the eighty-acre farm in Bath in 1919 from the Price Estate for \$12,000. They paid half of this amount with the equity received from the sale of their residence in Tecumseh, Michigan. The other half was loaned to them by the Price Estate and secured by a mortgage. A lawyer, representing the Price Estate, testified at the inquest that despite the fact that the debt had fallen into arrears as a result of Kehoe's failure to pay installments, no pressure had been put on him to pay off the mortgage. The lawyer was very clear on this point.

Additional evidence, available at the time, supports the conclusion that the farm buildings on Kehoe's property alone – not including the house – would have cost \$30,000 to build. The Kehoe residence was even more impressive.⁵ It was three stories and finished with oak floors throughout. The home had a furnace, a self-contained lighting system and pressure tanks that provided hard and soft water on all three floors. The covered front porch was approximately 8 feet by 24 feet and there was a screened-in second-floor porch. This home, totaling over 3,000 square feet, was far larger and more expansive and elaborate, than the residence of any other Bath citizen. There was good reason for the residence to be regarded, as it was by many, as the "Show Place" of Bath. The residence was originally constructed by Lawrence Price "without regard to expense," and equipped with "conveniences only to be found in the best city residences." Without a doubt, the sale of the house to the Kehoes was a gift to Nellie.

If there had been a real financial crisis for Kehoe in repaying his debt to the Price Estate, a portion of the farm equipment that Andrew Kehoe had at the farm – which was far in excess of what was required to operate the farm – could easily have been sold to satisfy the outstanding mortgage balance. Andrew Kehoe was attracted to machinery and acquired a great deal of it. His neighbors commented that he was always buying and rigging up new contraptions to farm the property. His neighbors also observed that Kehoe's tools, which were burned in the home and farm buildings on May 18, 1927, were of such fine quality that they "could be matched on few farms of the State."

While the transcript of the coroner's inquest establishes beyond dispute exactly what occurred on May 18, 1927, the testimony of the Bath citizens regarding their interactions with Andrew Kehoe is revealing. In their eyes, Kehoe was a "gentlemen farmer." He changed his shirts and clothes when they were soiled. He was always meticulous in his dress; "he was dressed pretty good" the day of the bombing. In this respect and others, Kehoe was far different from the ordinary residents of Bath. Many of the witnesses at the inquest testified that they knew that the speeding truck heading into town after the school explosion was Kehoe's because it had a "hub-meter" – a speedometer – attached to the left-front bumper. These were days in which few cars, or "machines" as the witnesses referred to cars, could ever achieve speeds on dirt roads of 30 miles per hour or more. Yet, Andrew Kehoe had a speedometer.

The testimony of one of the witnesses who saw Kehoe in his rush to town before he murdered school superintendent Emory Huyck is particularly revealing – "I knew him very well and he had gold teeth in front." No average person in rural Bath had a gold tooth much less "gold teeth." In March of 1925, the Clinton County Republican News reported that Kehoe and his wife entertained forty members of the "Bath Social Club" at their home with refreshments and a euchre tournament.⁶ No average person in Bath changed their clothes as soon as they became soiled. Local farmers did not purchase unneeded machinery to experiment in ways to farm. Indeed, no one in the Village of Bath drove to town in the morning to have someone serve him breakfast, as Kehoe regularly did, instead of eating at home. In these endeavors and no doubt many others, Kehoe figuratively threw his fine home, clothes and habits in the face of ordinary members of his community.

The transcript of the coroner's inquest provides other insights into Kehoe's relationship to the citizens of Bath. Kehoe was not only treasurer to the school, but a member of the school board. His unmistakable interest in these positions was to "co-op" the board and administration. Witnesses repeatedly attested to the fact that there was "friction" between Kehoe and other board members. Kehoe's main objective was keeping Emory Huyck "out of the board meetings" and the decision making process.

The witnesses attested to the fact that Huyck was a great advocate of the Consolidated School and that Kehoe was "very much against it." He had enjoyed some early but limited success in blocking some of Huyck's initiatives for the Bath school, but the young Principal was a quick learner and out maneuvered Kehoe in their subsequent political confrontations. Huyck never spoke badly of Kehoe. In the words of one witness, he "wasn't that type." Kehoe, on the other hand, had unvarnished enmity to members of the School Board who supported the property taxes imposed to build the Bath Consolidated School.

Despite the fact that by the date of the inquest his despicable deeds were well known to the community, several witnesses spoke in support of Kehoe's opposition, "in the politics of the community," to taxes. For example: "He said in his estimation the taxes were so excessively high he didn't know what would become of us." Despite initial support for his complaints about taxes, the inquest showed that once the bond initiative was approved, Kehoe's continued "quarreling and fighting" with the school board caused the Bath community to "kind of set down on him." He became ostracized and his opposition marginalized.

Evidence at the inquest also showed that Kehoe failed to plant corn and other crops on his farm in the Fall of 1926 and failed to harvest his beans and corn the previous year. The testimony further revealed that shortly before the bombing and killings, Kehoe "girdled" the fruit trees on his farm, meaning that he had cut the bark around the trees 1-1 1/2 inches so that they were destined to perish from lack of nutrients being carried from the roots of the tree to the leaves above.

The day after the Bath School Disaster, a sign was discovered on a fence at Kehoe's farm. It read "Criminals are made not born." The phrase might be attributed to Ravachol, the cult hero of French Anarchists in the late Nineteenth Century. It is unlikely, however, that Kehoe knew much of Ravachol. Ravachol did use explosives to destroy the home of a judge and a prosecutor, but he killed no one in these incidents. He was executed in 1892. In contrast to Kehoe, Ravachol did not have a fine house. He lived in despair his entire life. Indeed, Ravachol would have been deeply appreciative of the opportunities afforded to ordinary people by the Bath Consolidated School. He was a victim of poverty and he rebelled violently against his circumstance. It is more likely that Kehoe stole the phrase from one of the pulp presses of the day – Mystery Magazine – which utilized it in the title of a 1923 short story. No one will ever know. Nor does it much matter. The violence at Bath, Michigan in 1927, incomprehensible in its measure, was seeded from many conflicts near and far to the Bath community.

* * *

Few are aware that Michigan led the country in the mid-1800s in the establishment of funding for public education. Emory E. Huyck most certainly knew this history. Two New England transplants were responsible for the leadership that led to Michigan's pre-eminence in public school funding. Together, Isaac Crary and John Davis Pierce, who both settled in Marshall, Michigan, created the framework and support. Crary was elected a delegate to the state constitutional convention and successfully promoted the establishment of land grants to assist school districts in funding public education.

Crary envisioned the means for funding public education in Michigan, but John Davis Pierce was the organizer and implementer of the system.⁷ Crary was a member of Congress in 1835. At his suggestion, Pierce was appointed by Governor Mason as the first Superintendent of Public Instruction. Horace Mann of Massachusetts, nationally well-known, is often credited with originating our national system of public education, but Pierce presented his plan two years before Mann and his *Journal of Education* was published a year before the first publication of Mann's *Common School Journal*.

John Davis Pierce was born in New Hampshire in 1797. He spent his early years on a farm in Massachusetts, living a difficult childhood. Having lost his father to illness at age 2, he was given to his paternal grandfather to raise and, upon his grandfather's death when he was 10, Pierce was sent to live with an uncle. His relationship with his uncle became akin to that of an indentured servant. He was only allowed to attend school two months out of the year. Pierce's biographer indicates that by reading voraciously, he sufficiently educated himself to enter Brown University in 1813. He graduated in 1822, 8th in a class of 36.

Because Pierce was forced by circumstances to educate himself as a child, without the benefit of formal schooling, he recognized the value of an education in the development of both the individual and the future of the state as a democratic society. He felt that early training to follow rules, to be obedient, and to submit to constituted authority prepared children to govern themselves and to become useful members of society: "Disobedient children usually make bad citizens, bad subjects and bad rulers." In his view, physical, intellectual and moral faculties should be developed in just and equal proportions. To Pierce, education was both a science and an art. He was a practical and experienced teacher as well as a writer and organizer. He did not promote rigid methods of instruction, but encouraged individual teachers to devise their own methods.

Pierce did, however, recognize the necessity of training teachers: "a perfect school system must have a living soul, the teacher is its life and vital energy, its pervading innovating spirit." In his view, while the school curriculum should include the study of language, history and civics, geography, nature and physiology, he viewed the teacher

as more important than the book. Taken from his writings and speeches, the following quotations embody his philosophy of education:

None of the rich treasures of learning are gained by inheritance; there is no such thing as innate, inbred, hereditary knowledge.

A thoroughly trained and skillful teacher, with the most ordinary books, will do vastly more for his school than an incompetent teacher can with the best books ever written.

Ignorance is a fearful foe to freedom; but knowledge without virtue is certain death to the republic.

It ought to be borne in mind that the education of a child is far less expensive than the support of an aged criminal.

Education is the great business of human life.⁸

The great object of the public schools is "to furnish good instruction in all the elementary and common branches of knowledge for all the classes of the community, as good indeed for the poorest boy in the state as the rich man can furnish his children with all his wealth."⁹

Emory Huyck was an heir to this rich heritage of idealism. He was born in Carson City, Michigan in 1894, the seventh of eleven children. He was buried in the Carson City Cemetery in 1927 in a family plot. When she died fifty years later, his wife, Ethel, was buried next to him. That fact alone speaks volumes of the couple's relationship. Ethel died shortly after attending a ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Bath School Disaster. Some of the children, then senior citizens, who did not attend graduation in 1927, received diplomas at the ceremony.

Emory Huyck was a veteran of World War I and graduated from Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State University) in 1922. He became the Superintendent of the Bath Consolidated School that same year. The Huycks' commitment to education and the Bath community was evident. Ethel was an experienced teacher of vocal music.¹⁰ In 1924, the Grange Chorus, which she directed, won a statewide competition.¹¹ Ethel also arranged community singings and was a frequent solo vocalist at Parent-Teacher meetings at the Bath Consolidated School. Pierce valued the instruction of music and the vocal arts in the primary schools. In a 1838 article in his *Journal of Education*, he lauded their attributes:

What can so charm the young as music? What is there that all children everywhere love so passionately? Feel such noble ardor in attaining? Engage in with more unwearied perseverance and more rapid progress? What gives more to one individual of a power over the entire being and sympathies of many young hearts almost magical.¹²

Ethel repeatedly demonstrated this magic in her interactions with Bath students and their parents.

At one parent-teacher meeting in 1926, the Clinton County Republican-News reported that Superintendent Huyck “gave a very inspiring talk on consolidation” to a large crowd.¹³ At an earlier school event, the local baseball diamond was turned into a rally stage for a banquet for the high school classes. Each of the four classes took a base: first, second, third and home (for the seniors) and participated in spirited yells back and forth at one another. Emory directed the students from the pitcher’s mound, and Ethel sang a “very pleasing vocal solo.”¹⁴ During the school year, the Huycks frequently traveled to nearby Pierson Township in Montcalm to visit Ethel’s parents¹⁵, Soloman and Minerva Newcomb. Soloman was the postmaster at Pierson. In 1926, the Huycks rented a home on Fletcher Street in Bath near the school.¹⁶

The Huycks embodied the “Resolution of a Young School Master” that Pierce quoted in another article from his *Journal of Education* in 1839:

Resolved

1. To devote myself with all my powers and faculties, to the study of my profession.
2. To study attentively my profession.
3. Cultivate a love for it.
4. Reverence and study human nature.
5. Study, especially, the nature of the young.
6. Seek, and learn to seek the society of the young.
7. Preserve in myself, as much as possible, juvenile feelings and habits.
8. Read works of authors who write well for the young.
9. Visit and seek the society of parents.¹⁷

The subject of approving bonds for the construction of the Consolidated School hop-scotched its way across rural Michigan in the Twenties. The first time the bond issue to fund and construct a Consolidated School was placed before the voters in Bath, the proposal failed. On a second vote in 1921, it passed by only 68 votes.¹⁸ Communities that approved the bond issue and constructed larger and impressive schools, such as those in Bath, St. Johns and elsewhere, were eligible for state aid for maintenance, salaries and buses to transport students. Other villages and cities that voted down the bond issues and school age children in these communities received far poorer instruction. One of the novelties of the Consolidated Schools was that teachers and students did not need wristwatches because large clocks were placed in each of the individual classrooms.

Almost every Consolidated School also boasted a large library with hundreds, or up to thousands, of books for students and citizens to borrow.

As one crossed lines between districts that had approved a Consolidated School and adjacent districts that had not, the disparities between the educational opportunity for students was a source of great friction. The curriculum in Consolidated Schools included arithmetic, agriculture, language, history and civics, spelling, geography, grammar and composition, music, drawing and reading. The focus of traditional rural schools emphasized more rote drills and instruction in some of these subjects which were taught to several grades at a time. They rarely included music or drawing. Like racial segregation, these different types of school experiences created a quilt patch of disparate opportunity in the Twenties. But, unlike racial segregation, proponents of Consolidated Schools were well positioned to break these barriers. And by the mid-Twenties, the advance of the Consolidated Schools movement and its robust curriculum appeared all but inevitable across rural Michigan. This seeming inevitability was likely not lost on Andrew Kehoe. As one neighbor remarked years later, he was a man who was “bent in his ways.”¹⁹

* * *

The Bath School Disaster was not the first attack on a Consolidated School in Michigan. In nearby Ovid, a fire caused by accelerants burned a school to the ground on March 5, 1925.²⁰ The fire occurred at night and no one was injured. The damage was estimated at \$150,000, but the school was rebuilt within a year. This was notice to Kehoe that simply destroying the Consolidated School in Bath would not put an end to the steady spread of these institutions across the State. However, killing all the school children would moot the need for reconstruction.

Kehoe’s preparations for the bombing were meticulous and thorough. In October of 1925, more than a year and a half before the bombing, but only seven months after the Ovid arson, he purchased five hundred pounds of pyrotol. Working alone at night and utilizing his cover as school handyman, it took him months to secrete the explosives in the basement and beneath the crawl space of the school. As revealed by the subsequent investigation, the workmanship was of such high quality that many of the wiring connections had been soldered.²¹ The girdling of every fruit tree on the Kehoe farm and rigging of explosives to gasoline and oil to destroy the buildings and his residence must have been equally time consuming.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, members of the Lansing Fire Department crawled beneath the wings of the Consolidated School and removed the pyrotol wired to explode while the old portion of the Bath School and North Wing burned and injured victims lay trapped in the debris. At the time, they had every reason to believe that

one mistake, one false move, or an ounce of bad luck would cause certain death. Later asked why they undertook these courageous actions, Paul Lefke, Assistant Chief of the Lansing Fire Department, said directly and calmly: "That is our duty." Nurses, police and ordinary citizens also risked their lives in Bath on May 18, 1927. They entered the demolished and dangerous remains of the school to lift fallen walls and rubble to reach the dead and rescue the injured.

Near the site of the Bath School, a simple park exists today. It contains a monument honoring the dead and the cupola once atop the roof of the school. There is artwork and other remembrances in the school as well. Carlton Angel, a distinguished sculptor at the University of Michigan, created a statue of a nine year old girl holding a big tabby cat with his head on her shoulder draped like a rag doll down the front of her dress. He titled the statue "Girl with a Cat." She was not any particular child killed on that terrible day; she was one of many and represents all.

Kehoe blew up the school that was an affront to his anti-tax views. He killed innocent school children and teachers and intended to kill more. He burned his properties, murdered his wife, doomed his fruit trees and plowed up and otherwise abandoned his harvest. These acts were driven and calculated. In reflection, it is clear that Kehoe was intent on preventing the advance of a different tomorrow by destroying tomorrow itself. But, however great an effect the commission of such extreme and inconsolable violence would have on the residents of Bath, Kehoe knew the resolve of his personal adversary Emory Huyck. Thus, he believed that for his plan to succeed, he had to kill Emory Huyck. And, that is why after the bombing Kehoe circled in and out of the Village of Bath in a car loaded with dynamite. When he discovered that Huyck had survived the blast and was directing rescue efforts, he drove close to the school, beckoned Huyck to his side, and shot a pistol into the dynamite killing himself, Huyck and others in a short fierce blast.

* * *

Within months, the Bath Consolidated School was rebuilt. The community initially sought local contributions for the reconstruction. Local funding became unnecessary when Senator James A. Couzens of Michigan, one of Henry Ford's original partners, wrote a personal check for \$75,000 to the Bath School Fund. Consolidated Schools continued to spread throughout Michigan in the years that followed. Couzen's act was generous, but if the pyrotol under the South Wing of the school had exploded, no act of generosity could have provided hope to a community that had lost all its children. In reflection on the events leading up to May 18, 1927, Ethel and Emory Huyck deserve wider recognition than they have received in the historical record. Emory should be remembered as the principal on the pitcher's mound,

directing his students to celebrate their successes and their school, with Ethel singing magically to capture, in Pierce's words, the "sympathies of many young hearts." The Huycks were selfless, tireless and courageous. They were dedicated to the ideal of a better tomorrow for the school children of America. ■

[Ed. Note: The Editors have intentionally published this article without pictures. The reader who wishes to visualize may do an Internet search for "Bath School Disaster." The article by Monty J. Ellsworth (with its accompanying pictures) is particularly affecting. It may be found at <http://daggy.name/tbsd/tbsd-x.htm>]

End Notes

1. Betty R. Damren is a retired educator, living in Chelsea Retirement Community. She was born in 1918 and grew up on a farm near Adrian, Michigan. Her undergraduate degree was from Eastern Michigan University. After Pearl Harbor, she volunteered for the Red Cross and was stationed in London during some of the perilous times of World War II. She and her husband Samuel N. Damren married after the war and moved to Ann Arbor. She received graduate degrees from the University of Michigan and worked at the University's Children's Psychiatric Hospital and the Ann Arbor Public Schools as a reading specialist during her career. Samuel C. Damren is a Member of the firm of Dykema Gossett PLLC and Treasurer of the Court Historical Society.
2. *In the Matter of the Inquest into the Cause of Death of Emory E. Huyck, Deceased*, May 25, 1927 (364 pages).
3. Gene H. Wilkins, My Scrapbook on the Bath School Bombing of May 18, 1927 (Bath, MI: Timer Wolf Ltd 2002) at the Bentley Historical Society, University of Michigan, pages 46-52.
4. The Clinton County Republican-News, page 4, *The Bath Horror*.
5. Wilkins, *supra*, note 3 at page 31.
6. The Clinton County Republican-News, March 12, 1925, page 11.
7. Charles Hoyt and R. Clyde Ford, John D. Pierce, Founder of the Michigan School System, (The Scharf Tag, Label and Box Co. 1905).
8. Hoyt and Ford, *supra*, note 7 at pages 150-2.
9. *Id.* at page 1.
10. The Clinton County Republican-News, September 30, 1926, page 3.
11. Grant Parker, *Mayday: The History of A Village Holocaust*, (Perry, MI, Parker Press 1980), at page 37.
12. *Journal of Education*, Vol. II, #3, page 22.
13. The Clinton County Republican-News, March 12, 1926, page 11.
14. The Clinton County Republican-News, May 15, 1924, page 12.
15. The Clinton County Republican-News, May 21, 1925, page 2; December 3, 1925, page 17.
16. The Clinton County Republican-News, May 6, 1926, page 3.
17. *Journal of Education*, 1939, Vol. II, #8, page 58.
18. Parker, *supra*, note 11, page 12.
19. Wilkins, *supra*, note 3 at page 55.
20. The Clinton County Republican-News, page 1.
21. Wilkins, *supra*, note 3 at page 31.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Annual membership dues:

(Complimentary to Federal Bar Association members)

- Professional/Member \$ 25.00
 Sustaining/Patron \$100.00
or more

Please make checks payable to:

Historical Society – U.S. District Court – E.D. Michigan

Mail to Historical Society, c/o David A. Gardey, U. S. Attorney's Office, 211 West Fort Street, Floor 25, Detroit, MI 48226

Email: david.gardey@usdoj.gov

Telephone: (313) 226-9591; Fax: (313) 226-3265

Membership contributions to the Society are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____
DAY EVENING

This membership is a gift from: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

We would like to know about your interests and skills. Please fill in this questionnaire and mail it with your membership fee.

Legal practice area *(if applicable)*:

Special interests in the field of legal history:

Yes, I would like to assist and/or actively participate in the following of the Society's activities *(Check as many as may apply)*:

- Writing articles for the Society newsletter
 Conference planning
 Oral history
 Research in special topics in legal history
 Fund development for the Society
 Membership recruitment
 Archival preservation
 Exhibit preparation
 Educational programs
 Other *(please describe)*: _____

Suggestions for programs or projects:

THIS FORM MAY BE DUPLICATED AND SUBMITTED WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP FEE

*The Historical Society
U. S. District Court
Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse
Detroit, Michigan 48226*

U.S. POSTAGE PAID NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION Permit #153 Wyandotte, MI
--

RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED