

(Handwritten date: Thursday, October 24, 1940)

TRAGEDY TAKES LIVES OF FOUR MEMBERS OF DECATUR FAMILY IN CROSSING COLLISION
LAST NIGHT

Mr. and Mrs. Harley Kistler, Daughter and Granddaughter Are Victims of Speeding Passenger Train
At Twelfth Street Crossing of Erie Railroad; Bodies Are All Terribly Mangled

(By Bob Shraluka)

Simultaneous funeral services will be held Saturday afternoon at 1 o'clock at the Church of the Nazarene for four members of a Decatur family, whose lives were snuffed out by a roaring westbound Erie express train last night as they were returning home from prayer meeting services.

The dead:

HARLEY KISTLER, 55, Decatur tile mill worker;

MARVILLA KISTLER, 46, his wife;

BONNIE LOU KISTLER, 11, their daughter;

CAROL JUNE KISTLER, 2, their granddaughter

The four lost their lives in one of the worst traffic crashes in the city of Decatur in recent years. Their light 1937 model car was struck at the Twelfth street crossing of the Erie railroad about 9:45 p.m., and came at the height of the Decatur-Bluffton football game which was in progress only a block away.

The muffled boom that resulted from the speeding train tearing its way through the metal of the auto was heard by a few of the football fans and many saw the sparks that came from sliding train wheels on the metal rails as the brakes were applied. Showers of sparks also resulted from the twisted steel of the auto being ground under the churning engine wheels.

SCATTERED FOR BLOCKS

Bodies and debris were scattered for blocks along the Erie right of way. The broken, twisted body of Kistler, driver of the car, lay across the one rail of the track approximately 135 feet from the crossing, point of the impact.

The crushed body of his wife and their daughter lay huddled in between the rails another 45 feet toward the west. The little body of their granddaughter, who had been visiting them, was thrown far off to the south and into a side ditch 35 feet from that of her grandmother. Mrs. Kistler's head was crushed. Mr. Kistler's chest was caved in and all bodies were horribly mangled.

What was left of the puny-appearing auto was carried 900 feet from the scene of the wreck and then dumped off to the south side of the rails, approximately 100 feet on the west side of the Thirteenth street crossing.

Hundreds of persons, including many from the nearby football game, flocked to the scene of the wreck and saw the bodies and wreckage before the tracks were cleared.

Because the bodies could not be moved until the coroner arrived, an eastbound Erie train was flagged and held up for approximately half an hour while authorities waited for permission to life the victims off the rails and ties. A first call to Coroner J. Jerome Yager did not go through and he did not hear of the wreck until half an hour later when called by deputy sheriff Leo Gillig.

Allen Kistler, a son of the elder Kistlers, and the only one left at home after the tragedy wiped out the remaining members; Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Kistler, son and daughter-in-law of the elder Kistlers and parents of Carol June, learned of the accident a short time after it happened. Neighbors at the wreck scene kept them from getting close until the bodies were covered and ready to be taken to funeral parlors.

Officer Roy Chilcote, Sephus Melchi, chief James Borders, Sheriff Ed Miller and deputy Leo Gillig all answered the police alarms. Ambulances of Zwick funeral home, Black funeral home and Gillig & Doan funeral home all responded.

Authorities, ambulance drivers, members of the train crew and curious thrill-seekers aided in the search made (cut off)

...not more bodies were lying along the right of way.

A first report that the eastbound train had picked up the wreckage and dragged it back toward the scene of the first crash was found to be erroneous. The crew of number 7 train, the express which hit the auto, flagged the eastbound train and averted what might have been an even worse tragedy with scores of people walking on and along the rails.

NEARLY HOME

The Kistler family was only half a block from home when tragedy struck. They had been to the Church of the Nazarene, of which they are all members, to attend Wednesday night prayer meeting. The Harley Kistler home is located just half a block south of the 12th street crossing on Patterson street at the 12th street termination.

BORN IN NOBLE COUNTY

The members of the Kistler family were nearly all natives of Noble county. They had moved to the city about three years ago.

Mr. Kistler was born in Noble county September 6, 1885. His wife was born there July 4, 1894. Their daughter, Bonnie Lou, was also born in Noble county February 19, 1929.

Surviving besides the boy, Allen, who was graduated from Decatur high school; are the son, Ernest, and a daughter, Mrs. Roy Delancey, of Albion.

Little Carol June Kistler - was born in Decatur, April 30, 1938. Surviving her, besides the father and mother, Ernest and Thelma Smitley-Kistler, is a brother Jerald.

The bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Kistler were taken to Black funeral home and those of the two children to the Zwick funeral home.

FUNERAL AT 1 P.M.

They will remain at the respective funeral homes until time for the services Saturday afternoon at the church, with Rev. Paul Brandyberry officiating. All four of the victims will be buried at Kimmel, near Kendallville. The services here have been set for 1 p.m., earlier than is customary, so that the bodies may be taken to their native county for interment the same afternoon.

The bodies of three of the victims may be viewed at the funeral homes, probably after tomorrow morning, while that of Mrs. Kistler may not be viewed until some time later.

Engineer Blackburn and Conductor Smith, both of Huntington, were members of the train crew. Police officials, coronary Yager and W. M. Baumgartner, local station agent, were continuing their investigation of the accident today.

It was learned that Mr. Kistler was nearly deaf and this was advanced as a possible reason for his not hearing the approach of the train. The 12th street crossing is one of the few in the city that do not have flasher signals. It was estimated that the train was travelling 70 miles an hour.