

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Sled Accident"

Carroll County Times article for 07 March 1993

By Joe Getty

If you talk to anyone who was raised in Carroll County about winter-time and snow, reminiscences will invariably turn to the joys of sledding as a child. Coasting along the Piedmont landscape has a long tradition in Carroll County.

Such memories inevitably include stories of sledding accidents. Most Carroll Countians can recall sledding injuries or accidents to friends as part of their childhood experiences.

The most tragic coasting accident in the county occurred on January 9th, 1925, when Lynn F. Gruber was killed in a sled accident on College Hill in Westminster. The Democratic Advocate of January 16th provided the following description of the accident.

One of the most distressing and shocking accidents to happen in this city for many years occurred Saturday night about 10:30 o'clock when a double decker sled containing seven of Western Maryland College's faculty and students struck the automobile of Mr. Sterling Hively, of Frizzelburg, at Union Street, while coasting down College Hill, on West Main street, which resulted in the fatally injury to one and breaking legs and noses and lacerating the others. None escaped injury.

The dead is Lynn F. Gruber 3110 Baker street, center on the football team.

The injured is as follows:

Miss Bertha Hart, of Cumberland, head of the mathematics department; jaw crushed, leg fractured, cut and bruised; at Maryland General Hospital. Condition favorable but not out of danger.

Miss Roberta Wills, student, daughter of Prof. George S. Wills, head of the English department; leg fractured, nose broken, was taken to the hospital, Baltimore, Sunday morning on a stretcher on the 9:20 train. Her condition is not as satisfactory as should be up to this time.

Miss Ruth Warren, of Ellicott city, assistant instructor in chemistry; cut and bruised.

Frederick Warren, brother of Ruth Warren, dean of men; bruised; rendered unconscious.

Prof. James S. Rank, head of the history department; nose broken.

Miss Mary Adelaide Shriver, of Taneytown; bruised; suffering from shock.

Sterling E. Hively, of Frizzelburg, near Westminster, driver of the automobile; bruised.

Mrs. Hively, his wife; bruised.

A score of students, instructors and young folk of the town also were coasting on the hill at the time of the tragedy.

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Miss Hart and the others injured were taken into the store of Miss Emma Royer, corner of Main and Union streets. It required six persons to carry Miss Hart.

Gruber was guiding the sled down the hill as the automobile was headed up the hill. Both sled and automobile were caught in the deep ruts in the snow and neither was able to turn out. The automobile was almost at a halt when the crash came.

Gruber was dragged from under the automobile by D. Kenneth Shroyer, athletic director and head coach of the college, and H. B. Spier, assistant athletic director, who had been watching the sport.

His neck was broken, his skull was fractured and he was cut and bruised. His eyes flickered open and Gruber recognized Shroyer. He whispered: "Coach, I'm hurt."

He was hurried to the office of Dr. Lewis K. Woodward by two of his football team mates, Harvey Hall, end, and Charles Holt, quarterback, and then taken in an automobile to the University of Maryland Hospital, Baltimore, after hasty first aid treatment.

He died a minute after he was placed upon the operating table.

Gruber had returned last Monday to school after the two weeks Christmas holiday spent at the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin F. Gruber, 3110 Baker street. He was in the junior class and for three years had played center on the football team. He was a leader in Young Men's Christian Association activities, and would have been graduated next year prepared to enter the ministry of the Methodist Protestant Church. He also was a member of the college literary club and had graduated from the preparatory school connected with the college.

Dr. S. Luther Bare called an ambulance from Baltimore and took Miss Hart to the Maryland General Hospital after first-aid treatment. Dr. Robert P. Bay, in charge of her case, said she "reacted favorably, but her condition is grave."

Miss Shriver was the only one of the seven on the sled not connected with the university. She was visiting at the home of Miss Reifsnider. Miss Shriver is a daughter of Mr. Percy Shriver, and is now at her home recuperating.

The services Sunday morning at the chapel turned to a memorial for the dead student and football hero. Rev. Dr. G. I. Humphreys, president of the Maryland Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, delivered the sermon. He recalled how Gruber, as a boy, had entered the church and consecrated his life to the ministry in the West Baltimore church of which he then was pastor.

In a brief talk Coach Shroyer said: "Of all the men I ever knew, he was most ready to meet his God."

Prof. Warren said:

"Just what happened is hard to relate. Mr. Gruber either lost control of the steering or turned directly into the machine. At any rate, he went into it like a shot into a target, and the occupants

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of the sled were hurled in every direction. Gruber's head was jammed between the spokes of a forward wheel, while Miss Hart, who was seated next to him, was hurled over his head. The others were tossed about violently and I alone was fortunate enough to escape with only minor bruises.

"There was no chance to escape when the automobile came in sight. Whether it came directly up the hill or had turned from a side road I couldn't say. It was too close for us to dodge, or throw ourselves off the sled when we saw it, and we hardly had time to realize what was happening before the crash came. "I lay no blame on the driver of the car. He was keeping to the right, and our swerve to the left made the accident unavoidable.

"Under the circumstances, I consider it miraculous that only one life was lost. Mr. Gruber's death has cast a pall over the college, for he was a high type of student and athlete and extremely popular. It was a tragic and distressing affair and will not soon be forgotten."

According to eyewitnesses, parties manning five or six sleds were enjoying the sport at the time, but no sleds were directly back of the one which crashed into the automobile.

Ken Shroyer, head coach of the football team, and Coach Spier were passing at the time, and declared that the sled was traveling down the steep grade at a tremendous rate of speed when it struck the automobile.

The bobsled which Gruber was steering was of heavy design. Two ordinary sleds were attached to long boards while the steering apparatus, controlled from the front seat, maneuvered the leading sled.

Gruber was only an amateur at the steering of a sled of its kind. On Friday evening while steering down the same course, with a load of 20 on the sled he lost control and upset halfway down the hill, going at a rapid rate spilling the humanity over the course. Some were bruised but not seriously hurt. It was this double-decker that Gruber asked for, as it was the fastest on the hill, having made a run the night previous to the First National Bank, at the Railroad, and considered a run that was never equaled.

At noon Tuesday the Western Maryland College was closed to allow the faculty and students to attend the funeral of the popular young student at the home of his parents, in Baltimore. About 60 in number paid their last respects. A floral tribute of beautiful design was sent by the college.

Photo Caption: Lynn F. Gruber, a center on Western Maryland College's football team, was killed in a sledding accident in 1925. From the Aloha, the college's yearbook, 1925.