

TERRIBLE GAS EXPLOSION BODIES OF 388 CHILDREN AND TEACHERS RECOVERED¹

Accumulation of Gas Blamed 450 Estimated Death Toll at School

NEW LONDON, [Rusk Co.] TEXAS, MARCH 18, 1937 (AP) -

Military authorities viewed wreckage of the London Consolidated School in driving rain today and immediately called a Court of Inquiry to fix the cause of an explosion that buried an estimated 450 children beneath tons of rock and steel late Thursday. Today, 388 bodies have been recovered.



Major GASTON HOWARD, assistant adjutant general, appalled at the scene of the nation's worst modern child tragedy, said a board of six would start functioning late today. Survivors and eye witnesses would be questioned in an open hearing, he said. First definite indication that accumulated gas caused the blast that lifted hundred of school children, heavy girders and bricks hundreds of feet into the air, came from Major HOWARD when he said DR. E. P. SHOCH, noted chemistry professor at the University of Texas, had been summoned as a witness. Major HOWARD said DR. SHOCH, expert on gas explosions who had testified in similar hearings throughout the nation, would be hurried here by State Highway Police from Austin. [A paragraph listing the six members of the Board of Inquiry followed].

Rain drove down on the disaster scene, slowing workers who had reached the basement of one wing, piled high in the middle of the 150-yard long structure were bricks, steel beams and roofing. Workmen admitted it was under that pile that they expected to find many more bodies.

Nestled in a cluster of oil derricks in the heart of the world's most prolific flush oil field, the school, wealthiest rural institution in the nation, was a shambles. Dance halls, roller skating rinks, churches, hotels, hospitals and morgues in six nearby towns were filled with dead.

Workers boring into an almost impregnable mass of ruins wearied. Calls for replacements echoed over the vicinity from a powerful public address system. Some fell exhausted, others stripped to the waist stumbled out of dust clouds for fresh air and plunged back for more digging.

Born of oil, many authorities theorized the \$150,000 structure, show spot of the derricked oil belt, met destruction in the same manner. Superintendent W. C. SHAW who stood outside on the grounds and barely escaped death from debris that hurtled 300 yards in all directions said that it was "quite possible" that unburned gas from the nearby field had accumulated in basement crannies and hollow tile and finally gave way to spontaneous combustion. The odor of gas had been strong for weeks, he commented, and several survivors of the tragedy said gas fumes had bothered them recently. [The article continues and may be viewed in full at GenDisasters.]

Your editor tracked down this terrible school explosion story at the informative and well-done website GenDisasters at <http://www3.gendisasters.com/texas/> I got there because I was intrigued by an article which appeared in the March 22, 2007, edition of the *Longview News-Journal* entitled "Cenotaph honors those killed in school explosion." [A cenotaph is a monument to the dead who are buried elsewhere. Cenotaph is a Greek word meaning "empty tomb".] On that massive 20-ton Texas granite block are twelve life-size figures representing children coming to

¹ www3.gendisasters.com/texas

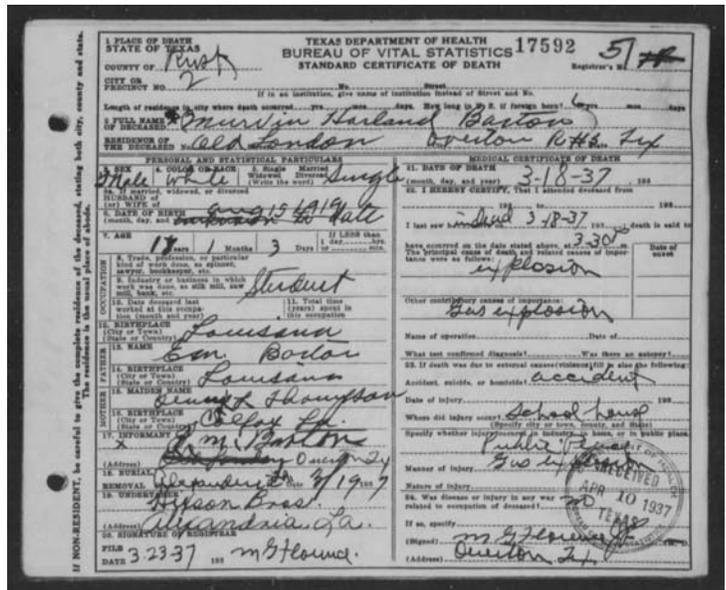
school, bringing gifts and handing in homework to two teachers. Amongst the names inscribed thereon are the names

Barton, Laverne

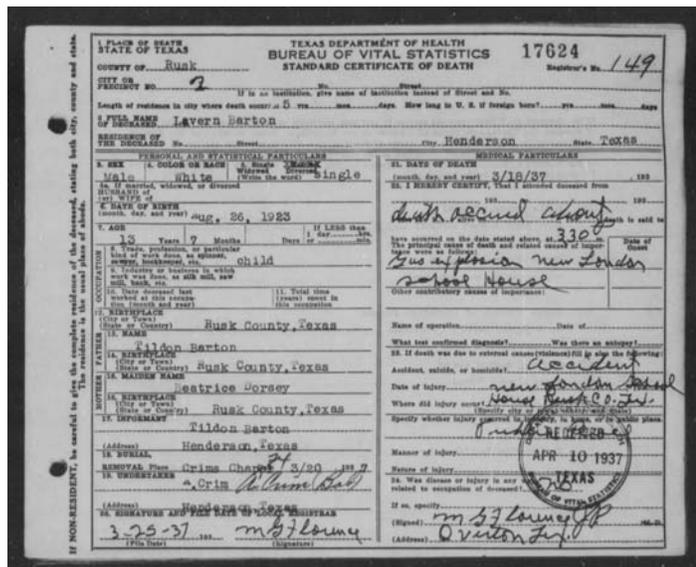
Barton, Murvin Harland

That of course piqued ye editor's curiosity... who were these two Barton children? Were they related? What could I learn about them? And so this genealogical sleuth got busy.

At Footnote™ www.footnote.com tens of millions of original documents have been scanned and are available to view on your home computer for a modest subscription fee. One of the hundreds of collections is Texas Deaths, 1890-1976 containing over two million images of Texas Death Certificates easily indexed and searchable. Murvin Harland Barton's provided many clues about this young teenager whose life was snuffed out so tragically. He was a resident of Old London, rural Overton, Rusk Co., Texas. Just 17 years, 1 month, and 3 days old he was born on August 15, 1919 in Louisiana. His father was **Earl Barton** whose birthplace was also Louisiana. His mother's maiden name was **Hennie L. Thompson** and she was born in Colfax, Louisiana. His body was removed to Alexandria, Louisiana, by the undertaker Hixson Bros. on March 19, 1937.



The Death Certificate for **Lavern Barton** was also found in the same Footnote™ collection. It, too, yielded a wealth of genealogical information. For starters, he (Lavern) was not related to Murvin as Lavern was a resident of Henderson, Rusk Co., Texas and had different parents. Lavern was born on August 26, 1923, and was just 13 years, and 7 months old. Lavern was born in Rusk County, Texas, to **Tildon Barton** (birthplace Rusk Co. TX) and **Beatrice Dorsey** (Birthplace Rusk Co. TX). Burial was at Crims Chapel, Texas, on March 20, 1937. The undertaker was **A. (Bob) Crim** of Henderson, Texas.



Armed now with information about these two Barton boys from two different families, one from Texas and the other from Louisiana, your editor (and database manager) turned to the

Barton Database www.bartondatabase.info .

A hit! All three Barton's mentioned on Lavern's Death Certificate – his father **Tildon Barton** (ID #I10419), mother **Beatrice Mineola Dorsey** (ID #I15000), and himself (ID #I20280) – are in the database. They are members of one of our large Texas families [J. Benjamin Barton, md. Zilpha Baker – DNA Lineage I]. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the family.

