


2006

Intelligencer Journal

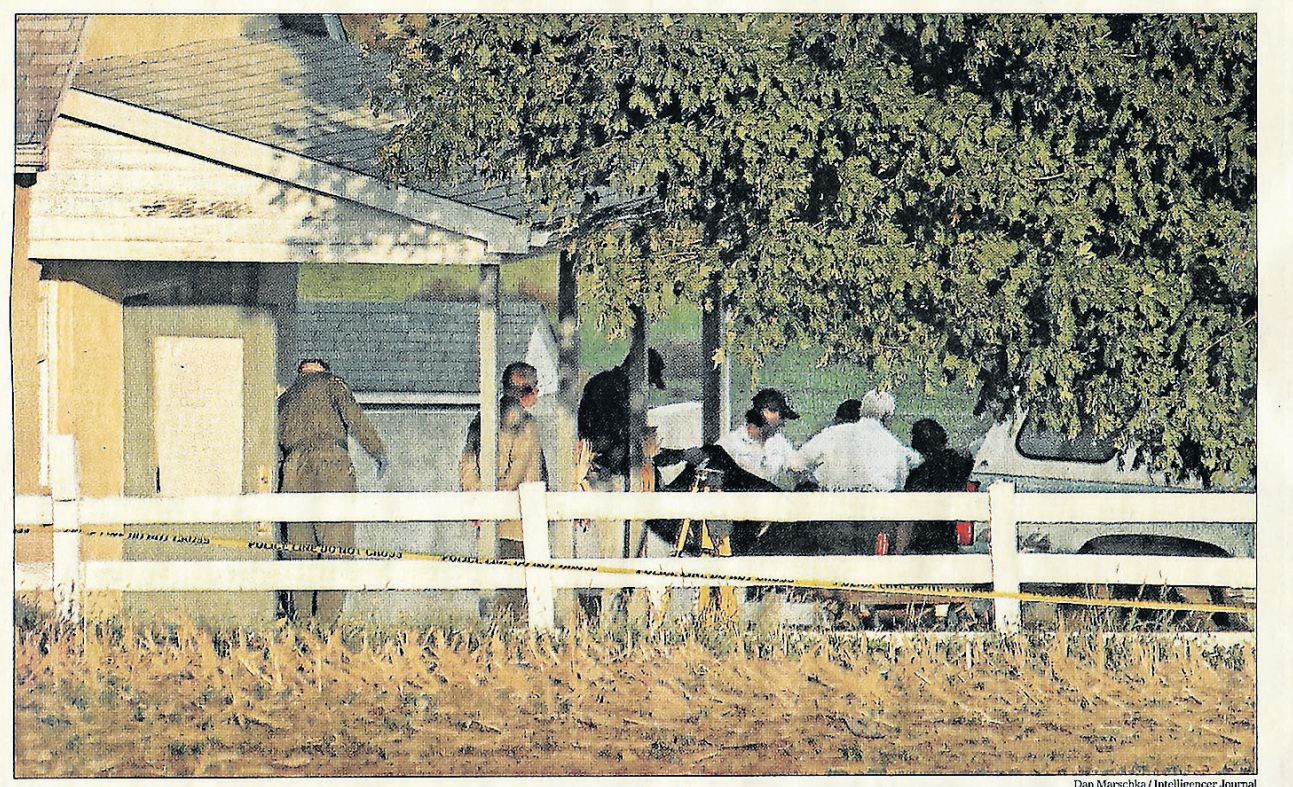
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DEATH of INNOCENTS

Gunman invades Amish school; kills 3 girls, self; wounds 7



A body is removed from West Nickel Mines School Monday night following a murderous attack at the Amish school earlier in the day.



WEATHER


Today: Morning fog followed by periods of sun. High 75.
Tonight: Clear to partly cloudy. Low 54.
Wednesday: An afternoon thunderstorm possible. High 80.

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Amish pupil heard gun being loaded

BY COLBY ITKOWITZ
Intelligencer Journal Staff

A stranger entered a one-room Amish schoolhouse Monday morning where 24 students ages 6 to 13 had settled in their desks for a German lesson.

The man wore glasses, a baseball cap and jeans, probably blue.

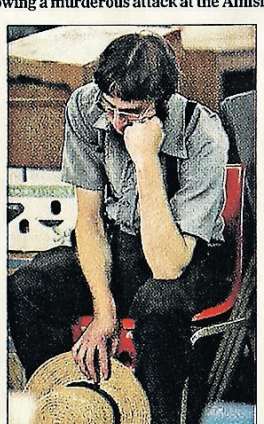
He asked a question, but Aaron Esh, 13, can't remember what it was.

The man then left.

Aaron, sitting at his desk, saw the man walk to a truck backed up to the front of West Nickel Mines School, a small, beige building protected by a white picket fence.

Aaron could hear the man outside loading a gun. He knew then, he said, something was terribly wrong.

About five minutes later, a man identified by police as 32-year-old Charles Carl Roberts IV stormed the classroom brandishing the gun and



An Amish man listens to a police report Monday.

demanding all the students lie down in the back of the classroom, Aaron said.

"He said, 'No one's gonna get Please see PUPIL page A6

Execution-style slayings planned; boys unharmed

BY BRETT HAMBRIGHT
Intelligencer Journal Staff

A suicidal 32-year-old man barricaded himself inside an Amish schoolhouse in Bart Township Monday morning and killed three girls before turning the gun on himself, police said.

State police said a fourth girl had died, but that report could not be confirmed Monday night.

Charles Carl Roberts IV, of Bart Township, walked into West Nickel Mines School, 4876 White Oak Road, around 10 a.m., dismissed the male students and bound the girls, police said.

About 45 minutes later, he began shooting the girls execution-style.

Three students and a teenage teacher's aide died, and at least seven other girls were wounded by gunfire before Roberts took his own life as state police stormed the one-room school, police said.

The victims' identities were not released Monday. The students all



Charles Carl Roberts IV

were 6 to 13 years old, police said, and the teacher's aide was 15 or 16.

"(Roberts) went in there and executed these children," state police Col. Jeffrey Miller said during a press conference Monday night. "No one deserves what happened here today."

The killings may be linked to an event that happened years ago in Roberts' life, police said, but they would not elaborate on the nature of the event.

Police said Roberts had no prior criminal history.

"We are looking at an incident in his past," Miller said. "There may have been a loss of a child at some point in his life.

Please see GUNMAN page A6

FOUR PAGES ON KILLINGS AT AMISH SCHOOL BEGIN ON PAGE A7

COVER 50 OF 52

FRONT PAGE

In the world of newspaper design, it is a closely followed rule that enormous, page-filling headlines are not to be used lightly, and should only appear for truly momentous events.

The moon landing.

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Such a headline was used in the Oct. 3, 2006, edition of the Intelligencer Journal to announce a local story — the horrific incident the day before at West Nickel Mines School, in which a gunman invaded an Amish schoolhouse and proceeded to slaughter its occupants.

Charles Carl Roberts IV, 32, barricaded himself inside the Bart Township school on a sunny Monday morning and then dismissed the boys and tied up the girls. He then began shooting

the girls execution-style. Three were killed immediately, and seven others were injured before Roberts turned the gun on himself as police stormed the one-room school. Two of the injured girls later died of their wounds.

All school shootings are horrific, but the circumstances of this one — a one-room schoolhouse filled with Plain-sect children, seemingly a window into a simpler past — magnified the horror and drew massive national attention. Media crews from Los Angeles, New York, London and other cities descended on the tiny community and joined local reporters in the quest to answer the biggest questions: "Why?" and "What now?"

Roberts was a truck driver and family man, the home-schooled son of a police officer. He was apparently tortured by the loss of an infant daughter nine years before the shooting,

and also confessed to his wife that he had molested two young relatives 20 years earlier, when he was 12.

Emails, letters and donations poured in from all over the world, as people tried to reconcile the image of bucolic Amish country with the modern terror of mass shootings. Just as prominent as the shooting in the national coverage was the aftermath, in which the Amish victims' families famously forgave the shooter and his family.

Forgiveness notwithstanding, the Nickel Mines shooting hovered in the local public consciousness for years after. The affected families and their neighbors, when they speak of it at all, refer to it simply as "the happening." The school itself was quickly demolished, and today the place where it stood is an empty pasture.