

Flooding at the Museum of Bus Transportation



by Larry Plachno

This photo looks over the fence into the George Sage Annex of the Museum of Bus Transportation. The date was Friday, September 9 and the waters have receded from their high point by a few feet. Buses both inside the Annex building and parked on the grounds were sitting in several feet of water. THOMAS MOZER.

In early September, the Museum of Bus Transportation in Hershey, Pennsylvania suffered severe flooding at its George Sage Memorial Annex building and storage area. Approximately 22 historical buses located both inside the building and parked outside were engulfed by water up to their windows or roofline. We have received numerous questions from all sources. Hence, we have assembled the following report which was put together approximately two weeks after the flood.

The primary museum facility was not involved. The Museum of Bus Transportation shares a very impressive building with the Antique Automobile Club of America as its public museum. This is located on Route 39 just northwest of Hersheypark. At the time of the flooding there were a dozen buses on display on the lower level of the building and another three buses on the property. These were not affected by the flooding.

There were also four museum buses located outside of the Hershey area being

stored or because of restoration. These four buses were not affected by the flooding.

The only facility affected was the museum's George Sage Memorial Annex. Display space is limited at the public museum on Route 39 and working on the buses at that location would be awkward. Hence, the George Sage Memorial Annex serves the purpose of a storage area for buses not on display as well as a location where some work can be done on the buses. The Annex includes both a building as well as outside storage. It is only open to the public on special occasions. The volunteer staff is only there when working on or moving buses, which is primarily weekends.

One end of the Annex property is located adjacent to Swatara Creek, which flows through the area north of Hersheypark and south of the main Museum building. Although the area is considered in a flood plain, the Annex has never had flooding problems in the past. Recent discussions on what to do about additional storage prompted museum President Tom Collins and Ken McNelis to meet with an engineer

to discuss the Annex property. At that time they were advised that the previous all-time high water mark for Swatara Creek flooding stood about five feet lower than the museum property. Hence, potential flooding was not a huge concern.

None of this mattered when Tropical Storm Lee lashed through the area knocking down power lines, closing roads and dropping more than 12 inches of rain. This is now being called the "2011 Hershey-Hummelstown Flood." The public museum on Route 39 was closed for two-and-a-half days because of nearby road closures due to flooding. Unfortunately, there was almost no warning when Swatara Creek rose above its banks. The family living in the house near the entrance to the Annex received only a 45-minute warning before water reached their home. No one was at the Annex building and most of the volunteer staff was some distance away at their normal places of employment.

On Thursday, September 8, water in Swatara Creek crested at 27 feet, or nearly 11 feet higher than the previous all-time



Taken on or about Tuesday, September 13, this photo shows the steering wheel and dash of the Capitol PD4106. While nothing is obviously broken, a film of brown mud covered most surfaces. JOT BENNETT.



This utility pole fell across the Annex fence during the flooding. The Annex still did not have power two weeks after the flooding. There was similar damage around the immediate area. JOT BENNETT.

record. Water on the Annex property was as much as seven feet high. Many of the buses parked outside had only their roofs showing above the water. Buses parked inside the building were also covered with water. The floodwater came up so quickly that when it flowed into the Annex building it scattered loose items like the refrigerator and battery chargers.

Reports were received that the storm and its water caused damage to Hersheypark and the Hersheypark Zoo as well as numerous local stores, businesses and residences. Several homes in the area were declared unfit for use and at least two have already been torn down. The water went down to a few feet on Friday the 9th. On Sunday the 11th, the anniversary of America's tragedy 10 years previously, volunteers were finally able to get into the Annex property to assess the damage. I might note that 22 students from nearby Lower Dauphin High School stopped at the Annex and helped in the

clean-up for a few hours before moving on to assist others in the area.

The bad news is that the papers stored in vans and luggage compartments were a total loss. These include timetables, schedules, transfers, old industry publications, and similar items. There was no choice other than to discard them.

The good news is that the Annex building itself suffered only minimal damage. It needs power washing inside and out but the building is firm and can easily be put back into use. The furnace is on the second floor and was not damaged. Even more interesting is the fact that some bus models kept in the Annex survived the flood and seem to be okay.

At this point the big question is the condition of the buses and whether they can be returned to their former appearance. A restoration firm recommended by two local

fire companies and the Antique Automobile Club of America did come in to look at the buses. They seemed to think that once the buses are dried out, they could save some of the interiors. Their comment was, "We have seen and worked on worse." There was insurance but as of this writing we have not yet heard what the insurance will cover.

Meanwhile the volunteers have started to work on the buses. They are handicapped because power had not yet been restored to the Annex. Since the Annex uses a well, the lack of electricity also means a lack of water. However, the volunteers have already gotten started draining engines and checking engine compartments.

It may take weeks or even months before we find out where things stand on each of the buses. Meanwhile, the museum will be in need of funds for repairs and cleaning not covered by insurance. They



This photo shows the Annex building and surrounding parking area at the high point of the flooding. The floodwaters covered everything but the roofs on some of the buses. Even those buses inside the building were sitting in a few feet of water. GEORGE HERWIG.



Taken on September 13, this photo shows that there is no serious damage to the Annex building or office. With some power washing inside and out, it can return to regular use. JOT BENNETT.



Inside the buildings, water destroyed any papers and moved around anything that was loose. Luckily, several model buses kept inside appear to be undamaged and only needed to dry out. JOT BENNETT.

do hold 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service. Donations can be mailed to: The Museum of Bus Transportation, 161 Museum Drive, Hershey, Pennsylvania 17033.

Following is a list of museum buses showing which ones were involved in the flood at the Annex and which ones were located elsewhere.

These dozen buses were on display at the Museum and were not near the flooding.

- 1927 Fageol
- 1945 Aerocoach
- 1947 Flxible (ex Capitol)
- 1971 Golden Eagle
- 1940 White
- 1951 Checker
- 1959 GM 4515
- 1924 Fageol (ex- Peninsula)
- 1954 Chevrolet School Bus (loaned vehicles)
- 1912 White (Martz)
- 1929 Yellow (Fullington)
- 1951 Fitzjohn (Wolf)

Although the following three buses were not on the Museum floor, they were on Museum property and hence were not near the flooding.

- 1934 Yellow (ex-blue Bird)
- 1946 Ford (on the outside display at the Museum entrance)
- 1945 Ford (recently delivered – on Museum tarmac)

The following four buses were off Museum property for various reasons and were not near the flooding.

- 1947 GM TDH 3207 (Johnstown) – stored at Wolf Bus Lines
- 1953 Flxible – Twin – .stored at Supreme Corporation

1955 Flxible Vista-Liner – stored at Supreme Corporation (going to ABC for restoration)

1935 International (aka Pierce Arrow) – undergoing restoration at Rohrer Bus

The following 22 vehicles were located either inside the Annex building or parked outside on the Annex lot. They were all sitting in several feet of water. Most are covered by insurance, but it may be a while before the extent of damage and repair costs is known.

- 1936 Chevrolet stretch
- 1947 GM PD 3703 (Michaud)
- 1952 GM PD-4103 (Greyhound livery)
- 1954 Flxible Visicoach
- 1956 GM PD 4104
- 1964 GM PD 4106
- 1974 MC-8

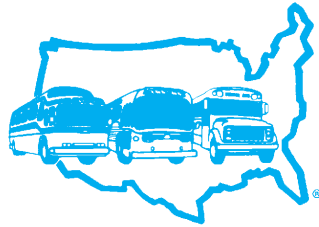
- 1977 MC-5C
- 1984 MC-9 (Bonanza)
- 1987 MC-9 (Trans-Bridge)
- 1953 GM TGH 3102
- 1990 Flxible 35096*
- 1990 Orion DO-4*
- 1975 AM General 9635
- 1973 GM P8M 4905A*
- 1971 GM TGH 3301
- 1972 GM T6H 5308*
- 1975 GM T6H 4523 (Capital Area)
- 1975 GM T6H 4523 (AMTRAN)
- 1977 GM RTS (Long Beach)
- 1985 Volvo B-10M (on loan GM PD 2903 (Peter Pan)

* The four buses marked with an asterisk may not remain in the permanent museum collection and have been considered for sale. □

This photo shows the interior of one of the transit buses, probably the RTS. A brown film of mud covers many surfaces. A restoration firm was somewhat hopeful and said that they had seen and worked with worse. THOMAS MOZER.



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