

# New England Town Stunned By Loss Of Skating Heroes In Airliner Crash

**Editor's Note:** Across the Atlantic from snow-covered New England the flaming crash of a jetliner Wednesday wiped out the U.S. figure skating team bound for the world championships at Prague — including the "First Family of Figure Skating," the pride of Winchester, Mass. To get the story of the first day's stunning shock there, United Press International sent in a special reporting team, headed by H. D. Quigg and including Anthony Potter and Ronald S. Supinski. Here is their account.

By UPI Special Reporting Team  
WINCHESTER, Mass. (UPI)—There is an ancient house, high on a snowy hill, where four women lived together alone — alone, except for a dream. Their dream was the dance on ice that is figure skating. Now there is one woman. She is nearing 81. For her the dream is ended.

It ended with the searing news from Brussels that her talented daughter and two talented granddaughters had died in the crash of a plane.

This town has had three heroes. It is the home of Joe Bellino, the great Navy hallmark, and of Massachusetts Gov. John A. Volpe. And until 4:05 a.m. Wednesday, when the crash happened, it was the home of a composite hero—the Owen family of champion skaters.

Out at first light of dawn today to its 5,000 subscribers went the weekly Winchester Star by mail. Its lean, bespectacled editor, James H. Penaligan, had started the presses rolling Wednesday night after pecking out a story on the most painful deadline of his career. It started out:

"All Winchester was deeply shocked and heart-sick Wednesday morning when radio news flashed to this country of the tragic deaths in a plane crash at Brussels, Belgium, of Laurence and Maribel Owen, internationally known figure skaters, and their mother, Mrs. Maribel Vinson Owen. The Owen home is at 195 High Street, where the 80-year-old Mrs. Gertrude Vinson remained with such high hopes . . ."

When the gold hands of the black-faced clock in the gray steeple of the First Congregation-

al Church reached 4:05 o'clock Wednesday morning, most of the 19,776 population of the town of Winchester were asleep. The town has 4,684 homes — mostly substantial, two-story, one-family dwellings with yards and shrubs and with snow drifted high at the white picket fences. The town center is 10 miles northwest of Boston.

But when the sun fired church spires shortly after 6 a.m., the tragedy began reaching the waking town by radio and TV. The last bell at Winchester Senior School is at 8:10 a.m. An honor-student senior at that school was Miss Laurence (pronounced lo-rah-nah because of her French ancestors) Roche Owen, U.S. and North American ladies figure skating champion, Olympic top-tot hope—and only 16.

What the students noticed when they arrived at school was the unusual quiet. The hallways were still. There were red eyes and puffy faces. A couple of teachers were crying. Laurie Owen had got up and skated every day from 5:30 a.m. until schooltime. Most everybody by now, at school, knew she would not be back.

When classes began, Principal W. Howard Niblock got on the public address system: "I am sure that all of you by this time are aware of the air crash . . . the skating world lost some outstanding skaters, but we lost a fine friend."

"If there was a happy note for Laurence in this tragedy, it was that her death came at her moment of greatest triumph — her victory in the North American championships (two days ago). Words are hollow things at a time like this. May we all bow our heads in a moment of silence, and our prayers will speak of our sorrow. Amen."

Down the locked-lined third-floor hall to Room 304 trooped the junior English class. Ruth White, prim and precise, sat at the teacher's desk under the American flag before the yellow wooden desks. Last year, Laurie Owen had proved one of the most promising pupils Miss White had ever had. She had written two poems which the teacher intended entering for a national anthology.

Miss White fished in a folder and brought out a piece of light-green ruled paper inked with delicate handwriting. She told the class she would read a poem that Laurie wrote, that showed what kind of girl she was more than anything that could be said about

her. She started to read, but the words wouldn't come. She couldn't even say the title. If she had read it, this is the way it would have gone:

**The Awakening**  
Softly,  
Softly the spring comes creep-  
ing o'er the tired land  
All men awake refreshed;  
They rise to greet the world with  
joy  
And birds sing, and all becomes  
new-born.  
Gloom is but a shadow of the  
night, long past;  
Hope is the light,  
The radiance.

The home where "Grammy" Vinson lives — and where her champion daughter and granddaughters lived — was built in 1812.

There are plank floors inside, and the place is filled with the trophies of skaters. Mrs. Maribel Vinson Owen, 49—"Mummy" to the two girls—was born in Winchester. She won the U.S. figure skating championship nine times and was a member of three Olympic teams. She married Guy Owen, a former Canadian champion, in 1938 in Winchester. He died in 1952.

Her older daughter, Maribel (Little Maribel and Big Maribel, they were called), 20, and her skating partner, Dudley Richards, 23, of Boston, who also was killed in the crash, had won the National Senior Pairs title in January. Little Maribel dreamed of teaching after finishing Boston University this June.

"Gee, the kids were fine kids," said editor Penaligan, in his office at the rear of a stationery store. "Nobody ever had a word to say against them. They were good with their books. Their grandfather, old Tom Vinson, was a state representative from the Beacon Hill district."

"They were a skating family. Old Tom used to put the skates on."

Mrs. Vinson, who will be 81 in July, still puts the skates on. She was reported today to be doing remarkably well, under sedation. Her doctor, the Rev. Dr. John W. Ellison of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, said: "She's this sturdy New England stock that takes whatever it had to take in stride—and that's that. She's a woman who has always had good health. She's never even learned to chew a pill."

"Grammy" Vinson was ready for breakfast when her cousin,

Miss Catherine Yerxa, arrived. Miss Yerxa had heard the news. She said nothing about it, but sat with Mrs. Vinson at the breakfast table. But the phone kept ringing—and also the doorbell — and Miss Yerxa was afraid Mrs. Vinson would be told the wrong way so she told her the plane had made a bad landing.

By that time, the doctor and the doctor had arrived outside and were deciding how they were going to break the news.

"The doctor went in, in three or four minutes," the doctor said, "and he gave her a shot of sedative and she didn't even ask a question. Then he sat down and told her there'd been a crash, and she said: 'Are they all dead? Tell me the truth; don't keep anything from me.'"

The doctor nodded an affirmative to her question.

The grandmother went upstairs to her bedroom.

By this time, the first editions of the Boston papers were arriving with the news, and townspeople gathered to read them and to talk on sidewalks. Said the Globe:

"The flashing silver skates of the Owen family of Winchester have been still in death."

The Traveler began its story:

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The graceful Winchester girl plopped in a conspicuous spot. On the cover is a color photo of Laurie, smile flashing, pixie haircut tumbling. "A lot of them are buying the magazine just for memory."

The day was fading, the sun beating from the horizon against the steeples and the City Hall's

red tower, and the big neon sign mirrors who thrilled to their fine personalities and skating skill . . .

And their mother, former champion, her daughters' friend, coach, greatest booster and severest skating critic; skating was her life, and she died accompanying her daughters to a world skating championship, a tragic, yet in a sense, fitting ending to a great sports career."

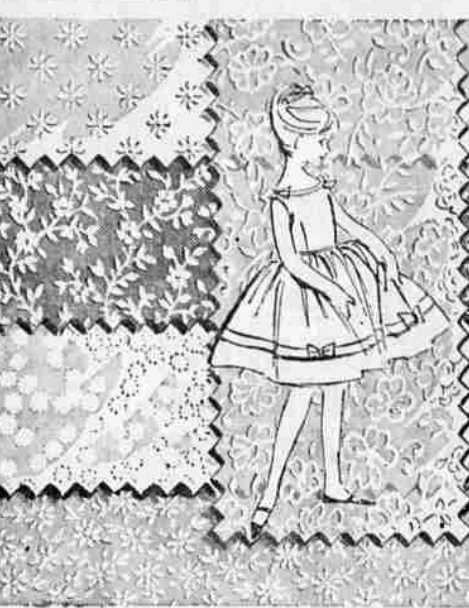
HERALD AND NEWS, Klamath Falls, Ore.

Thursday, February 16, 1961

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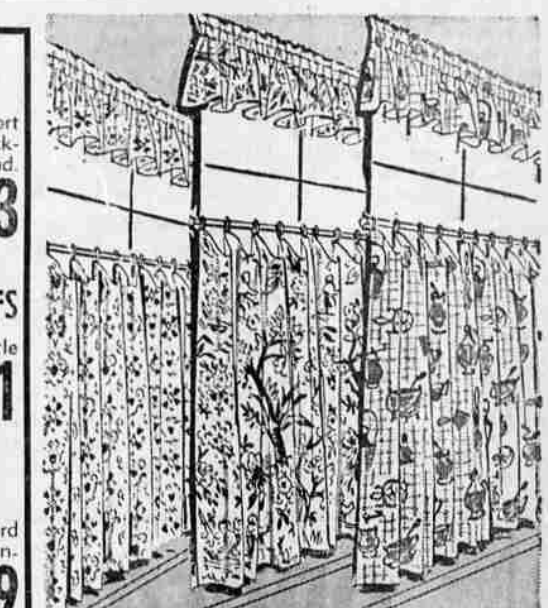


**GIRLS MIDCALFS**  
Wide Assortment of sport Fabrics. Two front pockets. Elastic waist band. Plain colors or prints.  
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Midcalf slacks for little sister. Easy on elastic waist band. Mach. washable.  
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**GIRLS JACKETS**  
Heavy weight Bedford cord with nylon quilt lining. Orlon pile lined hood. Machine washable.  
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All wool orlon pile lined. Full length. Buy now and save! .... **\$10**



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So low priced you'll want to have several bright changes for every window in kitchen, bedroom, den! A big assortment but hurry in — they'll go fast! Valance, 50c. **\$1.00** pair  
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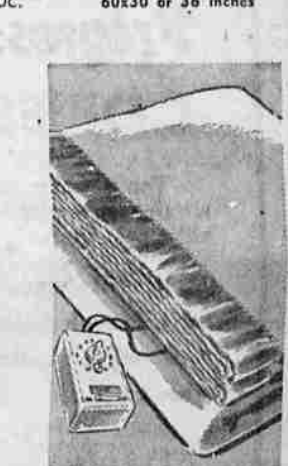
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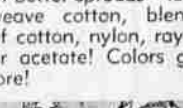
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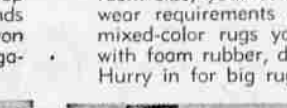
**SAVE! AUTOMATIC BLANKET BUY! \$10**  
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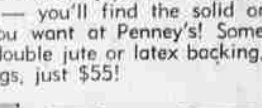
**SPECIAL! 3 PIECE PAJAMA SETS \$2**

Stack up! Save more! Pick posy-print cotton broadcloth sets . . . complete with long and short pants! Machine wash. In pink, blue. Sizes 32 to 38.



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What value! Note these more money features . . . front shadow panels, lavish embroidery, little or no ironing ease of care. White. Hand wash. In sizes 32 to 42.



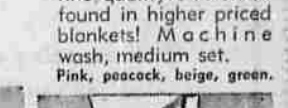
**MEN'S COTTON T-SHIRT BUY! 2 for \$1**  
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Sensational savings on Penney's flat knit combed cotton T-shirts. Get nylon reinforced crew neck collar and extra-shoulder seams. Machine wash!



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Short sleeve Acrilan acrylic knits boast luxury touch, machine washability (medium set). Get shawl, fashioned or self collar styles. Yours in new-look colors.



**BOYS' 13 3/4-OUNCE COTTON DENIMS \$1**  
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What a buy! Hefty 13 3/4 ounce western cut jeans . . . built for plenty of rugged wear. Blue 'n black or charcoal 'n black stripes. Machine wash. Sanforized!

**MISSES SWEATERS**  
Your chance to save! Orlon or wool blends, wide assortment of styles and colors. 34-38. **\$3-\$5**

**GIRLS SWEATERS**  
Orlon and wool blends. 100 from which to choose. Slipover or cardigans. Bulky or brushed. 3-14. **\$2-\$5**

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### FLB Meet Is Slated

General agricultural conditions in the Northwest will be discussed Feb. 25 at the annual stockholders' meeting of the Federal Land Bank Association of Klamath Falls.

The meeting and luncheon will be held at 12 noon in the Pine Grove Room of the Willard Hotel. Vance Withers of Paisley will report on the annual directors' meeting which was held in Spokane in November. Other reports and the election of directors will round out the business portion of the program.

Greer Drew and Elbert Stiles will show slides of their recent trophy hunt in Northern Canada. Bryant Williams, manager of the local association, will preside at the meeting.

### Woman's Trial Set March 6

HILLSBORO (AP)—Mrs. Audrey Henry of Portland, executive secretary of Serve Our State, Inc., will go to trial in circuit court here March 6 on a political material charge.

Mrs. Henry was indicted in November by a Washington County grand jury, charged with helping distribute false material concerning secretary of state candidate Monroe Sweetland last October.

Mrs. Henry entered a plea of innocent in December.



**Family Weekly**  
takes you behind the scenes of this popular TV show.  
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