The Children's Holocaust Memorial Facts

The Children's Holocaust Memorial was located on a hill overlooking the Chattahoochee Valley Electric Cooperative's power plant. It was built in 1998 by volunteers from the community and was dedicated on April 12, 2000.

The memorial consists of a bronze statue of a young girl holding a book, surrounded by a garden of flowers and a plaque with the names of those who died in the Holocaust.

The Children's Holocaust Memorial is located at 155 Bobcat Lane, Whitwell, TN 37397. For more information, please call (423) 628-6451.
The Children's Holocaust Memorial consists of an authentic German rail car that was used to transport victims to concentration, labor, and death camps. The rail car houses eleven million paper clips, one for each victim of the Holocaust. A small park surrounds the car. In the park there are eighteen butterflies some inlaid with stained glass and others free standing copper sculptures. There is also a monument honoring the children lost in the Holocaust. The school library houses over thirty thousand documents on CDs, a collection of Holocaust books, and art.

Facts and brief history of the rail car:

This rail car was built in 1917 and used for many purposes over the years. After being bought by a German state-owned company in the late 1970s, the car was used for intra-company transport and then abandoned. During World War II, the Third Reich used this car to transport prisoners to camps. The car was discovered after the war in Poland, near the town of Chełmno. It was used as a grain car after World War II. The grain holes in the floor and the ventilation holes in the roof were put in after the war. This historic rail car transported 80 to 150 prisoners to the camps at a time. The rail car at Whitwell Middle School was part of the "German Reichsbahn" and is one of the very last "cattle cars" of the Nazi era. The car was located in a railroad museum in Rosel, Germany. Peter Schroeder and Dagmar Schroeder Hildebrand (White House Correspondents for German newspapers) purchased the car and donated it to Whitwell Middle School. This German rail car, numbered 01-933, was also used in the European film "Stalingrad" and in the U.S. film "Enemy at the Gate."

How did the project begin?

In 1998, Principal Linda Hooper wanted to begin a project that would teach the students of Whitwell Middle School about the importance of tolerating and respecting different cultures. Mrs. Hooper sent David Smith, 8th grade history teacher and assistant principal to a teacher-training course in Chattanooga.

He returned and suggested an after school course that would study the Holocaust. Eighth grade Language Arts teacher Sandra Roberts held the first session in October of 1998. As the study progressed, the sheer number of Jews exterminated by the Nazis overwhelmed the students. Six million was a number that they could not grasp.

How the car made it to Whitwell:

When the Schroeders purchased the car from the museum in Rosel, they took on the daunting task of getting the car to Whitwell. After inspection by technicians of the German rail company, the car was declared "rollable" (maximum speed of 30 miles per hour). The German Armed Forces had the car sprayed and disinfected for foreign insects. The "Deutsche Bahn" had a decorative locomotive in front of the car and towed it under official designation "Special Train Holocaust Memorial." The car traveled 306 miles to the Germany port of Cuxhaven.

In Cuxhaven, the German Armed Forces put the Memorial Car on the chartered Norwegian freighter "MS Blue Sky" and transported it to the US port of Baltimore. Upon arrival in the United States, the car had to be cleared through customs and the required inspections of the US Dept. of Agriculture. In Baltimore, the US rail company CSX removed the rail car from the ship and placed it on a flat rail car. The company transported the car in this manner because of wheel gauge conflicts and regulatory problems. The car traveled from Baltimore to Chattanooga, where CSX loaded it onto the flat bed truck for the final leg of the trip to Whitwell Middle School. Fletcher Trucking Company of Whitwell provided the transportation from Chattanooga to Whitwell Middle School. B&B Crane Company donated the services of an operator along with a crane capable of lifting 600,000 pounds to set the car on the tracks at the Memorial site. The car sits on tracks made in Tennessee in 1943. Members of the community beautified the area surrounding the car.

The Collections:

One day, the teachers were explaining to the class that some compassionate people in 1940's Europe stood up for the Jews. After the Nazis invaded Norway and the Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David, many courageous people expressed solidarity with their fellow Jewish citizens by wearing a paper clip.

A student suggested that the group try to collect six million paper clips, one for each of the six million Jewish Holocaust victims. The idea caught on and the students began bringing in paper clips, from home, from family, and from friends. The group set up a web page asking for help in collecting the six million paper clips. The students also asked people to share their feelings about the Holocaust. A few weeks later the first letter arrived. By the end of the school year, the group had collected about 700,000 paper clips and several hundred letters and documents.

A variety of clips have arrived for the project, silver and bronze clips, colorful plastic coated clips, small and large ones, round and triangular ones, and even wooden ones. To date 30+ thousand documents and letters have also arrived. The students have filed all the letters they received in ring binders. Using the collected paper clips the students wanted to honor the victims with memorial.

The students, staff, and community of Whitwell Middle School have turned their project into the "Children's Holocaust Memorial." The students in Whitwell have collected over thirty million paper clips and over thirty thousand letters from all fifty states, over fifty foreign countries, and from all of the seven continents. For generations of Whitwell students, a paper clip will never again be just a paper clip. Instead, the paper clip will be a reminder of perseverance, empathy, tolerance, and understanding.

"Changing the World...
One Class at a Time"