

Strolling Through the Past

The Day the Music Died

As told by
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The Cinderella Ballroom was known for having “top-notch” entertainment over the six decades that it operated in the Town of Menasha. The bands that played there were always quite popular at the time of their performance and generated large crowds from all over the Fox Valley and northeastern Wisconsin.

However, there was one concert tour, which is still talked about across the nation, which was scheduled to play at the Cinderella Ballroom. In February 1959, the Winter Dance Party tour was scheduled for an afternoon performance at the Cinderella Ballroom. This tour consisted of several popular acts of the time, Richie Valens, Buddy Holly, J.P. Richardson (the Big Bopper), and Dion and the Belmonts.

The tour had just finished a show in Duluth, Minnesota the night before and was supposed to travel by bus to the Cinderella Ballroom for an afternoon show and then on to Green Bay for an evening show at the Riverside Ballroom. The tour’s bus broke

down outside of Hurley, Wisconsin and the band was unable to reach the Cinderella for that afternoon’s show. This put owner Charlie Maloney in a “bind”. According to the Feb. 3, 1959 issue of the *Post-Crescent*, Maloney had expected 2,000 kids to attend. He instead ended up booking a local rock ‘n’ roll band and charging 50 cents admission.

The tour did eventually reach their performance in Green Bay and went to Clear Lake, Iowa for their next performance. After that show, the group was tired of traveling on old, unheated buses and chartered a plane to fly them to their next performance in Moorehead, Minnesota. Only three members of the tour went on the plane, Richie Valens, J.P. Richardson, and Buddy Holly, with the rest continuing by bus.

Shortly after takeoff, the plane crashed in a field outside of Clear Lake, Iowa, killing all the passengers.

Maybe if their bus had never broken down on their way to the Town of Menasha, the group would have continued to use the bus as travel and the lives of these popular musicians would have been saved.

