

BAKER, VANLITA LUCILE  
1922-February 18, 1924

Disappearing from her home 7 miles northeast of Slater as suddenly as if she had vanished into thin air or been swallowed up by the earth, little two year old Bonita Baker Monday evening was sought for miles over the prairies by a force of a hundred men comprising nearly all the male inhabitants of the Slater Flats, until a driving blizzard at last force them to relinquish the hunt, when all hope of regaining her alive had been given up.

The little girl had last been seen about 3:30 p.m. Monday when she was playing near the house with two older children. Soon after that time the mother went out and saw she was not with the others. The older children said they had seen her a short time before chasing the chickens among the farm buildings. The mother, at once, began a search, little thinking that the child could have wandered far, or gotten into trouble in any way.

When Mr. Baker returned from a sale about 4:00 p.m., he took part in the search. As time went on and no trace was found, they became frightened and Mr. Baker summoned a searching party. Before dark a force of a hundred men had gathered and formed a line, walking about 30 feet apart. A bright moon aided the search, and it seemed unlikely that the cordon of men would overlook her. Others followed all the paths and trails in the neighborhood. Two men went a mile away to the Goshen Hole cliffs, and hunted all along the foot of the precipices.

The search went on for hours, and about 10:30, a driving blizzard set in with extreme cold, destroying the last hope that the little girl could be found alive. For some time they kept up the hunt, until near midnight when cold and fatigue made it necessary to stop.

Meanwhile, Messrs. Burckhalter and Walm had arrived from Guernsey with a still at 9:00 p.m. and after their arrival received a phone message calling for help. They gathered a party of nine men and went to the Baker home, arriving after the storm had made search impractical.

Searching parties took the field again for the lost baby girl of Mr. and Mrs. George Baker of Slater on Tuesday, over 100 men scouring that entire section of Slater Flats, on foot and horseback, while a party of 50 searched the cliffs and crevices of the cliffs into Goshen Hole, a mile from the Baker home. Not even a trace was located, however. Residents there are now proceeding on the theory of kidnapping, as a strange car had passed about the time the baby went missing.

Mr. Baker went to Cheyenne Wednesday to start investigation. Sheriff Burckhalter is on the Slater Flats today pushing inquiry.

Lying face downward in a shallow trough of rock a few yards from the beetling edge of the cliffs of Goshen Hole, the frozen body of two year old Vanlita Baker was discovered by Geo. Rhodes and Henry George of Slater at 2:45 p.m. Thursday, almost four days to an hour after she had wandered away from her home Monday.

The body of the child was found a mile and a half east and a quarter of a mile north of her home, a strange feature being to reach that spot she had to go directly against a strong wind that was blowing Monday. The discovery came fortunately during the closing drive made by 250 men from Wheatland, Chugwater and the Slater Flats on grounds that supposedly had been searched several times.

A number of men were taken by automobile to a point 3 miles southeast, where they formed a line across a section and started north on a search that was to close the hunt of the day, if unsuccessful. Already a considerable number had left for their homes, contending that the

search was useless. When the line had crossed the section to the north side, they met a line of horsemen coming from the south.

For a time there was consultation as to whether there should be a further hunt, when the order came to recover the ground just ridden over by the horsemen, who had been traveling too far apart. As the chasm of Goshen Hole, cutting at an angle across the line of the march, was reached, the line broke into staggering groups which skirted northwest along the top of the 300 foot bluff.

Several parties of men had gone around or crossed the shallow ravine containing the body, before Rhodes and George came directly upon it. The father, George Baker, was a short distance away when the discovery was made and the men present drew reverently back and allowed him to pick up the dead child and take it to the car of A.L. Hopwood, who carried it to the house.

The body had not been molested, showing only the bruises where her face had struck when she stepped off the two foot bench and fell into the shallow trough of solid rock. Sheltered from the sun, and doubtlessly partially covered by snow until the melting weather and wind of the previous day, it apparently remained frozen.

According to the Slater men present, the line of men searching for the child on the evening she was lost had approached the edge of the cliff within 200 yards from where she was found, but had turned back, unwilling to believe she could have wandered so far against the wind.

Captain of the party which found her was Lee Warren, whose wife and baby had perished in a blizzard in the same territory hunted over for the Baker child, during the winter of 1911. In charge of the entire party was Sheriff George C. Burckhalter.