

MIDNIGHT WRECK

THE LIMITED EXPRESS ON THE LITTLE MIAMI RAILROAD

Crashes Into a Yard Engine and Freight Train

Details of an Exceedingly Lucky Catastrophe

(Columbus Dispatch, September 17, 1886)

Owing to good management and extreme carefulness, railroad wrecks in and about Columbus are very rare occurrences. Last night at 11:35, however, one occurred on the Little Miami Railroad, a line on which wrecks are only known as being things marked by a lapse of years between. This accident was directly the result of somebody's misunderstanding or tardiness, and was withal a singularly lucky one as only a single person was injured. The details, as near as could be learned, were as follows: The freight train known as No. 40, due in this city about midnight, had come all right from West Jefferson, and was under the charge of conductor Stoddard. As is usual with the heavy freights on the Little Miami, a yard engine was sent out last night to help the freight up the heavy grade which begins just west of the city. This yard engine, under the charge of Engineer John Pratt and Fireman John Mull, had pushed the train up as far as the siding which runs along at the head of Gift street, in West Columbus, where a stop was made for the Hocking Valley crossing. Here there are several long line of freight cars usually standing, and it was by these that the train, after starting, was stopped by a whistle from the yard engine, and switching for the Hocking transfer begun.

For some reason the precaution of sending a flagman back to warn No. 2, the Limited Express, was not taken, and as a consequence the passenger, coming at a speed of about fifteen miles an hour, ran into them before it could be stopped.

On the fast passenger train there were five Pullman sleepers, a smoker and common coach, the load being pulled by engine 219, under the charge of Engineer Charles Brown and Fireman Herbert Custer. As the passenger entered the limits of the city the speed was decreased, but as the siding at Gift street always contains cars, the engineer could not see whether the track was clear or not until within too short a distance to stop. Engineer Brown, as soon as he saw a collision was inevitable, applied the air brakes and reversing the engine, called to Custer, his fireman to jump. This both men did, neither man being hurt, except that Brown fell on his shoulder and was bruised a little. The passenger engine went smashing into the

tender of the locomotive pushing the freight, and created something of a wreck, as can be well imagined. The engineer and fireman of this engine saw the danger in time, and got out of the way in a hurry so not an employee was injured. The yard engine, upon being struck, in turn crashed the caboose of the freight, and to add to the wreck, the caboose demolished a gondola which was just ahead.

The passenger engine was not seriously damaged, the pilot only being broken off, and no other injury given to the train. The passengers on the express were somewhat shaken up, but besides being frightened were not the worse off for their experience.

But the occupants of the caboose of the freight did not escape so easily. As soon as the switchmen and brakemen saw that a wreck would occur they shouted to the occupants of the caboose to get out. Two of them did so, but the third a farmer named Jonah Woods, who lives near West Jefferson, was caught in the wreck. He has little recollection of what happened, except that when he came to his senses, after being knocked down, he felt a heavy weight across his chest and knew he was hurt, since the blood was streaming from his face. The scalding steam from the engines was hissing around him and so, terribly burned and wounded as he was, he scrambled to his feet, after releasing himself from the things which had fallen on him. He climbed out of the hole in the roof of the caboose and was assisted to the ground. He was immediately taken to the West Broad street engine house, when the patrol wagon was summoned and conveyed him to Dr. Evans' office, where his injuries were attended to. These were found to consist of two cuts on his head, while his face, left wrist and right hand were badly scalded. He was made as comfortable as possible. Mr. Woods who lives on the Nelson and Winget pike about ten miles northwest of West Jefferson in Madison county, was on his way to this city to secure the body of his wife, who had died at Centralia, Ill., while on her way home from Colorado Springs. Mr. Woods expected the body on No. 2, but when he went to the station for it found it would not be here until today. The sorrowful and unlucky man bore up bravely, however, under his many misfortunes.

News of the wreck was speedily telegraphed to the city, and in a short time a wrecking train was on hand. Large crowd of people assembled and hacks were in great demand by the passengers. The track was cleared in an hour, and this morning all vestige of the wreck except splinters and the broken engines and cars on the side track, were cleared away.

The official report made of the accident throws the burden of the blame on the negligence of someone who should had flagged the passenger. When freight trains at night are using the main track this is invariable done, and the neglect last night was a flagrant violation of an established rule of the company. The wreck, according to everyone who knows any of the circumstances and surroundings, could have been averted if proper attention to duty had been given.

The passenger engine suffered so little damage that it will take out the pay car tonight. The damage will be a good many thousand dollars, since an engine, No. 220, a caboose and gondola were badly injured.
