

Editor's note: These articles were copied from the fourth edition of the October 20, 1902, Columbus Dispatch. It appears that as the day progressed additional material was added to the paper. Sometimes information seems to contradict previous portions of the article. Engineer Riter's condition became graver as the day progressed and according to the New York Times article on the last page he succumbed to his injuries.

BIG FOUR TWENTIETH CENTURY LIMITED DASHES INTO OPEN SWITCH

Engineer Fatally Hurt and Eight Others Injured

Doctors Hurry to the Scene from Delaware and Worthington.

Cars Pile Up in a Most Remarkable Manner and
Escape of Many From Instant Death Was
Miraculous ---Injured Brought to
Columbus

(Columbus Evening Dispatch, October 20, 1902)

THE INJURED

William Riter, engineer, lives in Cleveland. Probably fatally injured. Left leg broken hand scalded, head cut, and probably hurt internally.

William Stewart, fireman, Cleveland, lacerated thigh.

Jerry Hayes, baggageman, Cleveland, nose fractured.

George Hester, news agent, Cleveland, right hand badly bruised.

Benjamin Schwanger, salesman Cleveland bruised right leg and hand.

E.W. Donnelly, salesman, Mansfield, sprained back.

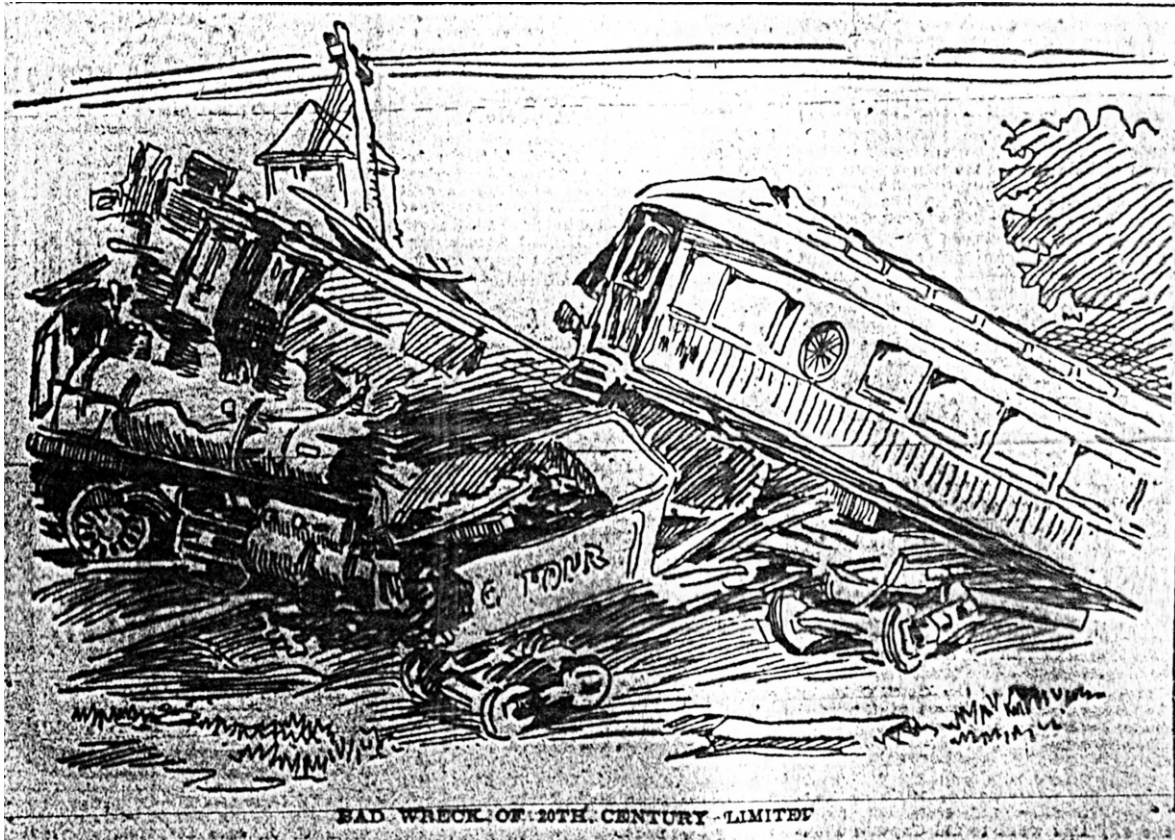
William Burne, Empire theaters, Brooklyn, right thigh painfully bruised.

H. Blackson, Fair Haven, N.J., both legs badly bruised.

Harry Minton, Fair Haven, N.J., slight bruises, left leg.

Mrs. May Myers, Wellington, suffered from shock.

Jerry Lahiff, conductor, Cleveland, bruised.



The Twentieth Century Limited, of the Big Four railroad ran into an open switch at Flint, O., 10 miles north of Columbus, Monday Morning and was wrecked. Two members of the crew, a baggageman and six passengers were hurt.

That many lives were not lost is considered a miracle. The train was speeding along at a rate of 75 miles an hour on its way to Columbus; where it was due to arrive at 10:23 o'clock.

It consisted of a combination car, two passenger coaches, a sleeper, a mail car and a baggage car. All of them but the last two were lifted from their trucks and ditched.

The engine was reduced to broken pieces of iron and landed against a pile of railroad ties.

The switch where the wreck occurred was near the little station.

As the engine neared the scene of the accident the engineer could see that it was open but it was too late.

He applied the air, but the speed was too great and the engine struck the switch and bounded into the air. It almost turned a summersault and when it landed it was facing north, the opposite direction to which it was going.

The baggage car and the two passenger coaches left their trucks and bounded with tremendous force against the wrecked engine.

The engineer says the last thing he remembers is applying the air. He had no sooner turned the lever than the engine began bumping and in its wake the passenger coaches, for a distance of 500 feet, completely tearing up the tracks and breaking in parts as each rail was passed over.

The excited passengers in the coaches began jumping from windows and getting to places of safety as soon as the train slackened and the commotion subsided. They pulled after them women who had fainted and the injured many of whom were unconscious for many minutes.

Two cars were thrown across the C. S. & H. [Columbus Sandusky & Hocking] tracks which paralleled the Big Four at Flint. The next two coaches were thrown to one side completely off their trucks. The last two coaches remained on the Big Four tracks. Both roads however were blocked for hours. The crash of the cars and the escaping steam were heard for miles. People hurried from every direction to the scene of the disaster.

Physicians were telegraphed for from Columbus and Worthington. Mrs. Weller and Johnson of Flint made a hurry run to the wreck in their buggies.

They took in the situation at once and had the train crew order a special from Delaware. In this the company's physicians were crowded, with surgeon's instruments and bandages for the injured.

While the "special" at Delaware was being made up dispatches were rushed over the wire to Columbus, where a train was made ready and a crew ready to start, as it was thought that many more were injured. The physicians with the assistance of anxious passengers and those attracted to the scene tenderly lifted the injured bodies to one side and began administering to them. They found Engineer Riter under a pile of debris between the Big Four and C. S. & H tracks.

Others were extracted much easier and soon temporarily bandaged to be taken to hospitals.

A wreck crew was dispatched from Delaware and with the assistance of passengers and on lookers the wrecked coaches were removed and taken back to Delaware.

An engine and a coach were brought from Delaware and soon had on board the prostrated form of Engineer Riter and the passengers who were able to travel. Extreme caution was used and the train slowly moved to this city with the injured.

The baggagemaster and foreman were placed on cots at Flint until "46" arrived and they were taken to their home in Cleveland.

The wrecked train arrived in Columbus at 12:40 and was met at the union station by a large crowd of anxious people. Many of them were railroad employees well acquainted with the injured all of whom they thought would be brought here.

The train was surrounded as soon as it backed into the station, and passengers interrogated for facts by anxious relatives of persons expected on the train.

Among those present was a young woman looking anxiously for her husband, who she thought was coming on the Big Four. She waited at the station and almost wrung her hands in anxiety until the train pulled in.

She scrutinized every face and she left satisfied that he was coming later.

The injured were exceptionally well cared for. The injured engineer was on a stretcher in the baggage car. Alongside him stood Dr. C. W. Chidester of Delaware. The stretcher was lifted to an ambulance and the unfortunate man rushed to the Protestant hospital.

The passengers stood about the station discussing their terrible experience and to quote one who said:

“It was a shock that can hardly be described,” is to express the statement of all those who were fortunate enough to continue on their journey.

Engine No. 393 which was reduced to a mass of twisted iron will be practically worthless. It was one of the new Atlantic Lake Shore type and one of the largest locomotives which runs on the fast trains regularly between Cleveland and this city. It lies in the ditch between the Big Four and Columbus, Sandusky and Hocking tracks headed toward Cleveland having been completely thrown around. It is doubted whether there is enough of it intact to rebuild the locomotive.

SHORT LINE TRACK BLOCKADED

The track of the Columbus, Sandusky and Hocking railroad is perhaps as badly blocked and torn up as that of the Big Four. When the train crashed into the switch it tore up about 250 feet of track and then threw the combination car over the Short Line tearing about 250 feet of rails from the ties there. The combination car lies crosswise over the track and other debris was thrown on the rails. It will take some time to repair the tracks for traffic and remove the coach lying on it.

ENGINEER RITER'S STORY.

His Effort to Set the Brakes Was The Last He Knew at Flint.

The worst sufferer in the disastrous wreck was the engineer, "Billy" Riter, who was at the throttle when the accident occurred. Riter with a broken left limb below the knee, bad bruises on the other leg, and severe scalds about the hands, arms, breast and his face, from the escaping steam was taken from the train at the Union Station and hurried to Protestant Hospital in Pletcher's ambulance. He suffered severely from his scalds and bruises but was able in incoherent sentence to give this story of the accident and how it happened.

Here is his story: "We were coming down the road through Flint. My engine, No. 393, was flying along at the rate of 75 miles an hour and with apparently a clear track. On nearing Flint I noticed an open switch. We were almost on it. The air brakes responded promptly but the momentum was too great and that is the last I knew." When picked up the engineer was lying between his engine, reduced to a mass of iron, and the combination car. He was unconscious, but regained his senses shortly after and was brought on to Columbus. At the hospital Dr. George M. Waters, the Big Four surgeon, took charge of the patient and dressed his wounds and reduced the fracture to his left leg. Riter is badly hurt but it is not thought fatally.

The injured engineer has been behind the throttle for twenty-three years and said at the hospital that it is the first serious accident.

He usually had the run of train No. 19 down and took No. 18 back in the evening. His home is in Cleveland.

Fireman William Stewart, who also lives in Cleveland, escaped with a cut on his leg and slight scalds. He was able to help himself at the wreck and was taken back to Cleveland on No. 46. Baggage man Jerry Hayes who was in the car immediately behind the engine had his nose fractured, and suffered severe bruises and slight cuts.

Engineer Riter could not tell how he was thrown from the engine nor could any of the three trainmen hurt. It all happened so quick that it was all over before they knew how it was done. The family of the injured engineer was immediately notified at Cleveland.

DISPOSITION OF INJURED.

Physicians Reach Scene on Special Train and Care for Hurt.

As soon as the wreck was reported to Delaware a special train was sent out from there bearing Dr. C. W. Chidister, the company surgeon, for that division, accompanied by his assistant, J.B. Woodworth. Drs. Johnson and Welling, of Worthington also drove over in their rigs. The injured were immediately taken in charge and cared for. Engineer Riter and Baggage man Hayes needed the most attention and were given attention at once. Mary Myers, an epileptic, on the way to Columbus for treatment went into hysterics when the shock came and fainted away. She was taken to a farm house near Flint and is doing well. Fireman Stewart and Baggage master Hayes were taken back to Cleveland on No. 46 and Engineer Riter brought to Columbus.

THE TRAIN.

Wrecked Was the Twentieth Century Limited West Bound.

Number 19, the wrecked train is the westbound section of the Twentieth Century Limited, and carries the through coach brought from New York by the Lake Shore Road. It leaves Cleveland at 7:25 each morning and stops at Galion, Columbus, Springfield and Dayton in its run to Cincinnati. It is one of the fastest trains on the road and it is no uncommon thing for the special to reach 80 miles an hour between Columbus and Galion. The run is made between the places at an average of 60 miles an hour for the distance nearly every day. Its equipment is superb.

CONDUCTOR LAHIFF.

Picked Up the Engineer for Dead -- His Statement.

Ill-fated No. 19 was in charge of Conductor J. Lahiff when the accident occurred. He brought his train into Columbus several hours after the wreck and had little to say about the accident. Conductor Lahiff was visibly affected at the serious injury to his engineer whom he picked up for dead.

“The first intimation I had of the coming danger was the tremor of the train as the brakes began to be set then a slight waver followed by the crash. I saw Engineer Riter thrown across the track of the Sandusky Short Line and lying between his engine and the combination car. He was gasping when picked up and I thought poor fellow was breathing his last. He was buried in the mud and a horrible sight.”

Conductor Lahiff was reticent to say anything about the cause for the accident more than to tell that it had been caused by an open switch. He would not fix the blame on anyone, and went on through to Cincinnati with his train.

PASSENGER BARRETT’S STORY.

Mr. E.L. Barrett, head of the Barrett Publishing Company, at Springfield, was a passenger on the train and when seen on his arrival at Columbus gave perhaps one of the clearest stories of the wreck. “The shock came.” said he, “In an instant. A grating noise and perceptible slacking in speed was followed by a crash. Every coach but the mail car and rear baggage car left the track. Only one, the combination car was thrown any distance and it shot by the engine, which was reversed in its position, and lighted on the Sandusky Short Line track.

One passenger coach was badly tilted and nearly ready to topple but the others stood upright. Here were perhaps 100 passengers on the train. No passenger was particular hurt beyond a server shaking up except one woman who fainted from fright. The wreck of the engine was complete and it was rendered practically worthless.

CHERRINGTON AND WHEELER.

Both in Big Four Wreck – Their Statement.

Among the Columbus people in the wreck were W.P. Wheeler, attorney for the Anti-Saloon League, and E.R. Cherrington, assistant superintendent of the league. These gentlemen had been in Cleveland on business and occupied the day coach next to the smoker.

They crawled out of the windows without sustaining a scratch. They claim it was due to Engineer Riter’s present of mind that a great calamity was prevented.

Messrs. Wheeler and Cherrington succeeded in rescuing Engineer Riter through the window of a car from his perilous position. He was perfectly rational and kept saying: “Why did they leave the switch open?”

He also kept calling for “Bill” the Fireman.

Mr. Wheeler said the train was going about 60 a minute when the crash came.

“Of course we did not have time to think. But I can tell you I do not want to have the same experience in this life again. Why, I lived 10 years in the next minute after the wreck. You can imagine what a fearful sight met our view when we escaped from our car and saw rails sticking up around as high as the coaches themselves.”

When asked who was responsible for the wreck, Mr. Wheeler said that it is generally believed at Flint that the blame lies at the door of the section hands.

SECTION HANDS

The section truck was in on the switch when the switch was open.

It is estimated by these gentlemen that there were about 100 passengers on the train. When Messrs. Wheeler and Cherrington escaped from their car they found that the Parlor car was on fire.

They immediately began to smash out the windows so as to save the passengers of that coach, but found they had made their escape. The fire extinguishers were then used and the fire was soon under control.

Among the passengers were Representative Cummins, Auditor Greve of Urbana and Mr. Palmer, who is associated with the Cleveland Electric railroad. There were also several members of the vaudeville show on its way to Columbus to fulfill its engagement at the Empire.

CONDITION CRITICAL.

Engineer Riter's Life Hangs by a slender Thread.

At 3 o'clock Engineer Riter at the Protestant hospital, was in a very critical condition. He suffers intense agony and his back also seems to be injured. The attending physicians fear that he will not survive his injury and the shock of his awful experience.

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Flint, OH Train Wreck, Oct 1902

Brooklyn Man Hurt in Train Wreck

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Oct. 20.1902 - The Big-Four Twentieth Century flier was wrecked at Flint, [Ohio], twenty miles north of this city on the Cleveland Division, about noon, by running into an open switch, and the entire train left the track except the last two coaches. The train runs from New York to St. Louis, and makes few stops. Engineer Ryder of Cleveland was fatally injured. The slightly injured from cuts and bruises were Will Burns, Brooklyn, N. Y., agent for the Empire Theatre, and Harry Minton, Fair Haven, N. J.

The New York Times, New York, NY 21 Oct 1902

WRECK AT FLINT.

Official Investigation by Railroad Commissioner Morris on the Recent Smash Up.

(Columbus Sunday Dispatch, November 9, 1902) – O.F. McJunkin, Inspector in the office of State Railroad Commissioner J.C. Morris, has made his report to Mr. Morris of his investigation of the wreck of the Big Four Twentieth Century Special at Flint several weeks ago, by which Engineer Ritter was killed and a number of persons were more or less severely injured. He says that without doubt the switch was left open, but as to who opened 'it' he is unable to say.

He found that a gang of section hands had been at the station just before the flyer arrived and some witnesses stated that they had run their flat push car in on the siding.

If so, however, the flat car was completely demolished in the wreck and not a vestige of it could be found.

Of course, the railroad company officers know whether a flat push car is missing or not and very likely they could give some important testimony but of course they will say nothing pending settlement of claims for injury in the wreck.

Mr. Morris said that the wreck occurred about half past ten a.m. and on an ordinary day the engineer ought to be able to see a switch target far enough ahead to bring his train to a full stop if he saw it was open, but there were always things about the engine needing his attention and while his eye was off the track for a moment such an accident might occur. Mr. Morris thinks he struck the switch at a speed close to a mile a minute.