



STREWN FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A MILE along the right-of-way is wreckage of a 97-car Pennsylvania Railroad freight train after an unexplained wreck three miles southeast of Hilliard early Saturday morning. Thirty-two of the cars left the track, many of them overturning. White spot in the center of the picture is a carload of flour which was broken open. Tankers loaded with gasoline and oil were overturned and the Hilliard Fire Department stood by because of the danger of explosion and fire. This aerial photograph was taken by Jack Hutton of the Dispatch photographic staff.

# 32 Freight Cars Derailed; Wreck Damage Is \$500,000

## Debris Blocks Right-of-Way Near Hilliard

Merchandise Scattered, Cars Smashed; No One Injured.

By Carl EBRIGHT

**(The Columbus Evening Dispatch, March 19, 1949)** A 97-car Pennsylvania Railroad freight train was wrecked about three miles southeast of Hilliard early Saturday, causing damage estimated at more than \$500,000.

The train, en route to New York from St. Louis, was wrecked with a tremendous roar at 5:07 a.m.

Railroad officials said 32 cars, some loaded with gasoline, fuel oil and highly inflammable ether, left the rails, strewing debris for about a quarter-mile along the tracks.

No one was reported injured, and railroad officials, who launched an investigation of the accident, were unable immediately to determine its cause.

I.W. Green, Columbus district engineer for the railroad, said some of the wrecked cars were splintered so badly the cause of the crash might not be determined for some time.

**Deputy Sheriff Clyde Mann said, however, that he was informed by a railroad official that the wreck was caused by a broken axle on one of the cars.**

The train was powered by a diesel engine. The first 54 cars and the last 11 cars of the train were not damaged. The 32 cars which left the tracks were in the center of the train.

Some of the wooden box cars were smashed to bits. The rails were twisted like hair pins and the roadbed was torn up. Communication lines and poles along both sides of the right-of-way were wrecked.

The train was loaded with all types of shipping. In addition to the gasoline and ether, some cars contained flour, corn, charcoal, tractors, tools, a road grader and general merchandise.

At noon, a foamite truck from Port Columbus was called to the wreck scene as a precautionary measure against fire. Officials were afraid that a smoker might touch off the gasoline or ether.

**One car was loaded with bulk wine, which spilled out along the tracks. Spectators, some with tin cups, were making use of this in the accustomed manner.**

J.M. Williamson, division superintendent, said nearly all of the boxcars were fully loaded. The five carloads of flour, which were wrecked, were assigned for European export.

There was no fire, but the Hilliard Fire Department was standing by because of the over turned gasoline and other cars. Official said a spark might set off a terrific explosion.

Williamson said traffic will be blocked on the line until about 4 p.m. Saturday. It will be some time after that, however, before all the debris is cleaned up.

**Trains are being re-routed by way of Xenia and Dayton. A passenger train, which left Columbus Saturday morning en route to Chicago, was routed by way of Richmond, Ind.**

Chicago-New York traffic is being re-routed over the B&O lines through Piqua.

Two wreck trains were at the scene shortly after the accidents and others were expected later in the day from Indianapolis and Richmond.

The accident occurred just north of Roberts Rd. about six miles northwest of Columbus. The two main lines and a siding were blocked by the debris.

The railroad's telephone lines were torn down by the accident. Crewmen went to the farm home of L.O. Walcott, 4191 Scioto-Darby Rd. to report the wreck.

G.J. McCloskey, division trainmaster said he was called out of bed before the exact location of the wreck was determined.

He said he was told by the train dispatcher that "all of the telegraph wires are down" somewhere between [Mounds Tower] and Milford Center.

He said the dispatcher knew that nothing short of a major train wreck could have done so much damaged to the communication system.

**Track repairmen were transported to the wreck scene in all types of vehicles. Large graders and bulldozers also were transported there for use in repairing the badly damaged roadbed.**



When asked if \$500,000 was a fair estimate of the damaged, McCloskey replied:  
“I wouldn’t be a bit surprised that it would run that high.”

Officials declined to discuss the probable cause of the wreck. One said, however, that a break in an axle could have been caused by either the cold weather or a flaw in the steel.

A Hilliard grain dealer salvaged much of the flour. Eleven cars containing meat, fruits and vegetables were removed quickly from the scene. These cars were on the tail end of the train and were not damaged.

Contractor’s equipment, including a huge road grader and air compressor, were crushed in the wreckage. The corn, flour and charcoal were spilled on the ground.

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Wheels of box car dug deeply into the ground when cars overturned in the wreck of a large Pennsylvania freight train early Saturday morning three miles southeast of Hilliard just north of Roberts Rd. Although no one was injured in the wreck, cause for which is sought, damage was estimated at half a million dollars. Photo by Dispatch Staff Photographer George A. Smallsreed, Jr



Scores of sacks filled with flour were broken open in the wreck of a large Pennsylvania freight train Saturday morning three miles southeast of Hilliard.