

# Railroad accidents brought out heroes

May-24-1997

On Aug. 31, 1903, the 40-foot-high railroad trestle over Fishing Creek, 2½ miles east of Yorkville, collapsed as a Southern Railroad passenger train went over it.

On July 30, 1913, the 50-foot-tall trestle over Hooper Creek in Chester County went down as a Lancaster & Chester train passed over it.

In both wrecks rail cars were converted into scrap iron and kindling wood.

Both wrecks resulted in death and numerous painful injuries. There were parallels between the two wrecks, although they were 10 years apart and happened to two different railroad companies.

Each wreck had its heroes. In the Fishing Creek wreck all of the train personnel were out of the picture. The engineer, fireman and mail clerk were killed, and the brakeman and baggage master were severely wounded.

Immediately, B.F. Williford of Charlotte took over. Later, a neighboring farmer who ran to the scene of the crash testified that "Mr. Williford was the only passenger who tried to help the other passengers."

T.L. Carroll witnessed the rescue efforts. He praised the young women for their work with the injured and said of Williford: "... He would look to the injured and give some poor fellow a swallow of whiskey or water."

At the L&C wreck, there were three dead, four critically wounded and 47 injured, most of them severely. Two of the critically wounded died later. The engineer had a half dozen freight cars across the trestle when the coal car jumped the tracks and pulled the passenger cars off the trestle.

The engineer, John Stewman, who quickly got to the nearest phone to call his superintendent to send doctors and nurses, was a hero.

In both cases, all local doctors came to the scene. So did dozens of people from nearby farm houses. The doctor's pain killer was mor-

phine. The farmers and their wives supplied whiskey.

The few private hospitals were not able to handle the numbers. The Fishing Creek injured were distributed among Parish Hotel in Yorkville and the hospitals in Rock Hill and Blacksburg. Some of the least seriously injured were taken into private homes.

In Yorkville, when it was seen that the Parish Hotel could not take all the injured, volunteer women "in a remarkably short time dusted and cleaned up an unused store room and furnished it with cots sent from their homes."

Chester's Magdalene Hospital, the largest hospital in this area was able to take in 47 passengers from the L&C wreck. The patients were moved from a rescue train by automobile, ambulances and wagons. Fennell Infirmary in Rock Hill sent five nurses to Chester.

What, or who, was to blame for the accidents?

In the Fishing Creek case, a jury heard testimony that rotten timbers were the cause. The railroad employees testified that they had reported the problems time and again. Southern Railroad acquired the line from the South Carolina and Georgia Extension Railroad company July 2, 1902. They had not inspected the track or trestles, according to citizens. Southern Railroad representatives testified that the trestle and lines were in good condition.

C.W. Garris, the S.C. Rail Commissioner, testified that there were 3,000 miles of railroad line in South Carolina and that the state legislature had not seen fit to pay for adequate inspection.

In the L&C case there was little blame, and the wreck was generally accepted as "an act of Nature."

Nevertheless, Col. Leroy Springs decided that henceforth the railroad would not carry passengers but only serve as a freight train between his Lancaster and Chester cotton mills. That policy has never changed except for rare excursions in which the public is invited to travel the 29 miles between Lancaster and Chester.

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

## MOVIES

**ANACONDA:** Galleria Mall 2:10, 4:40, 7:35 p.m., 9:35 p.m. (Saturday-Monday only), 4:40, 7:35, 9:35 p.m. (PG-13)

**ADDICTED TO LOVE:** Cinema 7 1:30, 4, 7, 9:25 p.m. (Saturday-Sunday only), 7, 9:25 (R)

**AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY:** Cinema 7 1:15, 3:15, 5:15, 7:15 p.m., 9:15 p.m. (PG-13)

**BREAKDOWN:** Galleria Mall 2:15, 4:40, 7:10, 9:25 (Saturday-Monday only), 4:40, 7:10, 9:25 p.m. Cinema Twin (call for times) (R)

**THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK:** Cinema Twin (call for times)

**FATHER'S DAY:** Cinema 7 1:45, 4, 7:15, 9:35 (Saturday-Sunday only), 7:15, 9:35 p.m. (PG)

**THE FIFTH ELEMENT:** Crown Cinema 2:30, 7:10 (Saturday and Sunday only), Cinema 7 2, 4:30, 7, 9:30 (Saturday-Sunday only), 7, 9:30 p.m. Crown Cinema 7, 9:10 p.m. (today-Sunday only) (PG-13)

**JUNGLE 2 JUNGLE:** Crown Cinema 3, 5 p.m. (Saturday-Monday only), Cinema 7 2:10, 4:30, 7:10 p.m., 9:30 p.m. (Saturday-Sunday only), 7:10, 9:30 p.m. (PG)

**LIAR LIAR:** Cinema 7 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20 (Saturday-Sunday only), 7:20, 9:20 p.m. (PG-13)

**THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK:** Crown Cinema 7 p.m., 9:20 (today only) 2, 4:30 (Saturday and Sunday only), Galleria Mall 1:40, 2, 4:30, 5, 7:20, 7:50, 10:10, 10:30. (PG-13)

**LOVE JONES:** Cinema 7 1:30, 4:15 (Saturday-Monday only), 7, 9:15 p.m. Cinema Twin (call for times) (R)

**NIGHT FALLS ON MANHATTAN:** Galleria mall 2:25, 4:30, 7:15, 9:25 (Saturday-Monday only), 4:50, 7:20, 9:25 (R)

**THE SAINT:** Cinema 7 1, 4 (Saturday-Monday only), 7, 9:25 p.m. (PG-13)

**SCREAM:** Cinema 7 1:15, 3:45 (Saturday-Sunday only), 1:15, 3:45, 7:10 p.m., 9:15 p.m. (R)

**SPRUNG:** Crown Cinema 9:30 (today), 5, 9:30 (Saturday and Sunday only), Galleria Mall 2 (Saturday-Monday only), 4:30, 7:05, 9:10 p.m. (R)

**VOLCANO:** Galleria Mall 2:20 (Saturday-Monday only), 5, 7:20, 9:30 p.m. Cinema Twin (call for times) (PG-13)

**WARRIORS OF VIRTUE:** Crown Cinema 3, 5 p.m. (Saturday-Monday only). (PG)

## Pineville

**ABSOLUTE POWER:** Park 51 1:05 (1:05 Saturday-Monday only) 3:40, 7:10, 9:45 p.m.

**ANACONDA:** Carolina Pavilion 11:25 a.m., 1:30, 5:05, 7:30, 10, 12:25 (today through Sunday only).

## HAPPENINGS

**ROCK HILL COMMUNITY THEATRE:** Auditions for William Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew," today and Sunday, 236 W. Main St., Rock Hill. Call 324-9033 for times; 20 roles available for men, women and children of all ages. The play will be performed July 18-19 and 25-26 at Fewell Park.

**PIEDMONT MEDICAL CENTER:** Heart Support Group meeting, 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, Classroom #3. Guest speaker Bill Wells will discuss stress management. Free. Details: 329-1234.

**HISTORIC BRATTONSVILLE:** Self-guided audio tours 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 2-5 p.m. Sunday. Cost: \$5 adults, \$2 students ages 7-17. Children under 7 admitted free. Historic Brattonsville is located 12 miles south of Rock Hill off S.C. 322.

## Andy Garcia Manhattan

1:30, 5:05, 7:30 through Thursday

**AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY:** Carolina Pavilion 5:25, 7:35, 9:45

10:45 a.m., 12:10 a.m. (Saturday-Monday only)

1:05, 3:15, 5:25 Thursday only

**BREAKDOWN:** 7:30, 10:30 a.m., 12:20 a.m. (Saturday-Monday only)

12:45, 3, 5:15, 5:15, 7:30, 10:30 (R)

**CHASING AMERICA:** 12:35 a.m., 7:25 p.m. (Saturday-Monday only)

10:15 p.m. (Saturday-Monday only)

**DANTE'S PEAK:** 8:05, 10:50, 1:45, 5:30 (Saturday-Monday only) (R)

**ENGLISH PATROL:** 5:25, 7:15, 9:45 (today through Sunday only)

midnight (11:30 p.m. through Sunday only)

Details: 666-1111

**DANCE:** 7-9 p.m. Tuesday

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