

WAPPINGERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

New York Central Train Wreck

Chelsea, July 29, 1906

Compilation by Eileen Stickle

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Newspaper articles relating to the train wreck were taken from the "Old Clinton Postcards" website. The news clips were from The Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle and the Cold Spring Reporter. Photo of the train wreck is the property of the Wappingers Historical Society.

Cold Spring Recorder

Friday, August 3, 1906

BAD WRECK ON THE NEW YORK CENTRAL

Train 37, Due Here at 11:05, Sunday Night, Plunges into Landslide Near Chelsea

Train 37, the Pacific Express on the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad, which left the Grand Central Station at 9:32 o'clock Sunday night and which was due at Cold Spring at 11:05, ran into a landslide over tower 53, located between Chelsea and New Hamburg, better known as the lower end of the Troy middle track. The engine, No. 3994, in charge of Engineer Edward Wells of New York, and Fireman Warren, of New York, was completely wrecked. Fireman Warren died in a short time and Engineer Wells died a half hour after being taken to the Highland Hospital at Mattewan. Edward Kelley, a well-known Poughkeepsian, was badly injured. Harry Taylor, the short stop of the Poughkeepsie Baseball team, the players of which were returning from Paterson, N.J. was also badly injured his leg being wrenched and the flesh torn.

The dead are: Edward Wells, engineer, New York City, Fireman Warren, New York City.

The list of injured includes Edward Kelly (sic), Poughkeepsie; right arm sprained. Brought to Poughkeepsie.

Harry Taylor, Poughkeepsie, leg wrenched and flesh badly torn. Taken to Highland Hospital.

John Cranstens, New York, baggageman, wrist badly cut, leg bruised. Brought to Vassar Hospital.

Mrs. Warren Reynolds, Peekskill; arm broken. Taken to Highland Hospital.

Mrs. Augusta Herath, Schenectady; arm broken. Taken to Highland Hospital.

Dr. J.E. McCambridge, Poughkeepsie. Legs cut. Came to Poughkeepsie.

John Hassel, Jr. 19 Prospect Street, Poughkeepsie; legs bruised.

Charles Nawe, Poughkeepsie, 56 Union Street; hip injured.

The train was in charge of Conductor McIntyre and arrived at tower 53 about 11:30. It is evident that Engineer Wells saw the track blocked with earth and stone. The train was moving at the rate of thirty-five miles an hour. He shut off steam, applied the emergency brake and blew the whistle. The passengers were somewhat startled but before they could make any inquiries as to the cause of the sudden application of brakes the crash came.

The big locomotive plunged into the heap of earth and stones and the locomotive and baggage car were a complete wreck. Baggageman John Cranstens, who escaped serious injury, immediately ran to the tower and reported the wreck. Word was at once sent to Poughkeepsie and a request made for all the physicians available. The wrecking train, in charge of Wrecking Master George Fonda, was soon on the way to the wreck. A half hour afterward a special train on which were many physicians also went to the scene and doctors were also sent up from Fishkill.

After striking the earth and stone the engine proper plunged directly across the track and lay but a few feet from the river's edge. The tender of the locomotive was thrown further up the tracks and on the east side of the tracks. The baggage car, which was completely demolished, lay in the debris while the smoking car was thrown across the tracks, almost into the river. It is a miracle how the passengers in the smoking car came out alive.

Immediately after the crash the passengers who escaped injuries paid all attention to those who were either pinned in the wreckage or were seriously hurt. Thomas Unseld, Charles Buckingham and George Clark of Schenectady went to the engine and there found the engineer and fireman badly hurt. It was a pitiful scene. The two injured men were found close together on the mass of twisted iron and were clawing at each other, their minds being affected by the terrible scene. They were carried to one of the cars and made as comfortable as possible. The fireman died in about twenty minutes and the engineer was taken to Highland Hospital, where he died in half an hour.

At half past three o'clock a train was made up on the north side of the wreck and the passengers brought to Poughkeepsie. Later they were taken to Albany. Traffic was blocked and trains were made up on with side of the wreck, the passengers being transferred and taken to their destination.

Baggageman Cranstens had a very narrow escape from meeting his death in the wrecked car. Just a few minutes before the engineer blew the whistle, Cranstens had walked into the smoking car to get a drink of water. It was while he was in this car that the crash came and wrecked the baggage car.

Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle

Monday, August 13, 1906

CORONER GORING RENDERS VERDICT AS TO THE CAUSE OF WRECK AT CHELSEA- NO PROVISION MADE BY COMPANY TO CARRY OFF WATER FLOWING DOWN BANKS

THE CORONER'S MEMORANDUM

Coroner Goring has rendered his verdict as to the cause of the death of Engineer Edward Wells and Fireman Wellington Warren in the wreck at Chelsea. The coroner decides that the wreck occurred because adequate provision had not been made by the railroad company for carrying off the unusual volume of water clear of the tracks. In his memorandum, which accompanies the verdict, the coroner speaks of an object lesson close by, referring to a state road which is kept in a safe condition because of conduits being constructed to carry the water under the road. The verdict and memorandum follow:

The Verdict

That the deceased, Edward Wells and Wellington Warren, came to their deaths at Chelsea, town of Wappinger, on the 29th day of July, 1906 from injuries received in the derailment of the Pacific Express (Train 37) of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad, said derailing being caused by the deposit of sand, gravel and other debris, washed upon the tracks by local storm of exceptional violence, precipitating an unusual volume of water, for the safe conducting of which, clear of the tracks, adequate provision had not been made.

The responsibility for this non-provision, and whether such a contingency could, and should have been foreseen, cannot from the evidence before me be definitely determined, all the witnesses are employees of the railroad company, and for reasons personal to themselves, no aggrieved party appearing at the examination either in person or by representative.

EDWARD M. GORING,
Coroner

The Memorandum

The coroner also submits the following memorandum:

Death has sealed the lips of the only eyewitnesses, Engineer Edward Wells and Fireman Wellington Warren but the cut-off throttle and applied brakes speak louder than lips could utter. "We did what we could to save all" and the hour, the place, the then weather conditions, account for the meagerness of direct and pertinent testimony, but the story is told in detail even now. In the reconstructed railroad, the new sleepers and rails, the loads upon loads of gravel and sand thrown over on the river side of the tracks, and otherwise disposed of. Let me briefly give the conditions at the beginning. Given, a sloping, grassy plateau of a dozen or more acres in area, reaching to the brink of the river bank, seventy-five feet above the tracks, along the top, a series of rudely made gullies or tranches, to lead the water into a self-worn gully, formed in the hard pan top soil, some four feet in width and more in depth, ending on the bottom, on the railroad level, in a strata of gravel and sand ten or more feet in depth. This is the recent and present condition. Given, also, a succession of storms that water-snake the plain so that it can contain no more, then at midnight, a downpour as if the very floodgates of heaven had opened, the water from the upper ground, rushing from all points to a common centre, the smooth..... gully, before noted, the rush of the flood to the gravel pit at the bottom, the swash of this watery compound onto the tracks, the headlight of the coming, but doomed train, revealing the inevitable to the man at theas he cuts off the steam, throws on the brakes, the engine mounting the mass of debris, plowing up the sleepers, rails and ballast for 500 feet, meeting with a second and like obstruction. With a leap into the air lands across all three tracks, her front in the river, the fireman crushed in death, and the engineer wounded to unconsciousness, and dying without recovering it, mute, yet speaking evidence, but not on the record.

The water, gravel, sand and debris all come from territory outside of the railroad boundary. The safe conducting of the first would insure the inevitability of the latter at this point, for all time. The ravine down which the flood comes is the result of many years gradual wearing away of the hardpan. Just what the rights and responsibilities of the abutting owners may be is not within the province of this office to decide, but I am assured that the prevention of this and similar accidents is easy and certain if the water is safely conducted down to and under the tracks. An object lesson is close by. On the other side of the sloping plateau in question, a mile away, and parallel with the railroad, there has been, built within the past two years, what is popularly known as a "state road" built at the joint expense of the town, county and state. The slope is greater in area and steeper in grade hence more water is care for, yet not a barrowful of dirt, has been deposited by storms on any part of the three miles of its length the reason for which lies in the fact that there are fifty or more conduits to carry the water under the road. Half a mile of like engineering will ensure immunity from another Chelsea tragedy.

The strength of the chain is measured by its weakest link. Years of immunity from accident at this point is the chain. The link of further assurance is broken. Will the lesson be lost?

EDWARD M. GORING,
Coroner

Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle
Monday Morning, July 30, 1906

BAD WRECK ON THE NEW YORK CENTRAL

Train 37, Due Here at 11:38 Sunday Night, Plunges Into Landslide Near Chelsea

POUGHKEEPSIANS HURT

ENGINEER AND FIREMAN ARE KILLED AND TWENTY-FIVE PERSONS, INCLUDING SOME POUGHKEEPSIANS, ARE BADLY INJURED-POUGHKEEPSIE BASE BALL PLAYERS ARE ON THE TRAIN AND SHORT STOP TAYLOR RECEIVED WRENCHED LEG AND FLESH IS BADLY TORN-EDDIE KELLY, OF THE CITY, IS BADLY INJURED-ENGINE AND SMOKING CAR ALMOST PLUNGE INTO THE HUDSON.

Train 37, the Pacific Express on the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad, which left the Grand Central Station at 9:32 o'clock Sunday night and which was due at this city at 11:38, ran into a landslide near tower 53, located between Chelsea and New Hamburg, better known as the lower end of the Troy middle track. The engine, No. 3994, in charge of Engineer Edward Wells, of New York, and Fireman Warren of New

York, was completely wrecked. Fireman Warren died in a short time and Engineer Wells died a half hour after being taken to the Highland Hospital at Mattewan. Edward Kelly, a well-known Poughkeepsian, was badly injured. Henry Taylor, the short stop of the Poughkeepsie Base Ball team, the players of which were returning from Paterson, NJ was also badly injured his left being wrenched and the flesh torn.

THE DEAD

Edward Wells, engineer, New York City, Fireman Warren, New York City.

LIST OF INJURED

The list of injured includes Edward Kelly, Poughkeepsie; right arm sprained. Brought to Poughkeepsie.

Harry Taylor, Poughkeepsie, leg wrenched and flesh badly torn. Taken to Highland Hospital.

John Cranstens, New York, baggageman, wrist badly cut, leg bruised. Brought to Vassar Hospital.

Mrs. Warren Reynolds, Peekskill; arm broken. Taken to Highland Hospital.

Mrs. Augusta Herath, Schenectady; arm broken. Taken to Highland Hospital.

Dr. J.E. McCambridge, Poughkeepsie. Legs cut. Came to Poughkeepsie.

John Hassel, Jr. 19 Prospect Street, Poughkeepsie; legs bruised.

Charles Nawe, Poughkeepsie, 56 Union Street; hip injured.

POUGHKEEPSIANS ABOARD

Among the passengers on the train were the Poughkeepsians: John Hinkley, Harry Burroughs, John Dorsey, Edward Gannon, Archie O'Brien, Joseph Walsh, Thomas Birney, Edward Robinson, James W. McDonald, Jr., William Shelley, George Van Tine, Charles Wolff, John Robinson, and the members of the Poughkeepsie ball team. Manager McCabe decided to remain over in New York and was not on the train.

The train was in charge of Conductor McIntyre and arrived at tower 53 about 11:30. It is evident that Engineer Wells saw the track blocked with earth and stone. The train was moving at the rate of thirty-five miles an hour. He shut off steam, applied the emergency brake and blew the whistle. The passengers were somewhat startled but before they could make any inquiries as to the cause of the sudden application of brakes the crash came.

The big locomotive plunged into the heap of earth and stones and the locomotive and baggage car were a complete wreck. Baggageman John Cranstens, who escaped serious injury, immediately ran to the tower and reported the wreck. Joseph Walsh, a Poughkeepsian, went through a hole in the floor of the smoking car into the river but managed to crawl to the shore and escape without injury.

RESCUING THE INJURED

Immediately after the crash the passengers who escaped injuries paid all attention to those who were either pinned in the wreckage or were seriously hurt. Thomas Unseld,

Charles Buckingham and George Clark of Schenectady went to the engine and there found the engineer and fireman badly hurt. It was a pitiful scene. The two injured men were found close together on the mass of twisted iron and were clawing at each other, their minds being affected by the terrible scene. They were carried to one of the cars and made as comfortable as possible. The fireman died in about twenty minutes and the engineer was taken to Highland Hospital, where he died in half an hour.

At half past three o'clock a train was made up on the north side of the wreck and the passengers brought to Poughkeepsie. Later they were taken to Albany. Traffic was blocked and trains were made up on with side of the wreck, the passengers being transferred and taken to their destination.

CRANSTEN'S NARROW ESCAPE

Baggageman Cranstens had a very narrow escape from meeting his death in the wrecked car. Just a few minutes before the engineer blew the whistle, Cranstens had walked into the smoking car to get a drink of water. It was while he was in this car that the crash came and wrecked the baggage car. To an Eagle representative who was at the scene of the wreck, Cranstens said, "As soon as the crash came I felt my way around and found a window. The heat and steam was something unbearable. I thought of the other trains that might come along and decided to go to the tower where I gave the siren. I had in mind train 80, which I supposed had not gone by, and if she had crashed into the landslide and wreckage the result would have been appalling."

Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle

Tuesday, July 31, 1906

THE WRECKAGE CLEARED AWAY

PILE OF DEBRIS ON TRACKS NEAR CHELSEA IS CLEARED BY NINE O'CLOCK ON MONDAY NIGHT

INJURED ALL DOING NICELY

The wreck at Chelsea was cleared away before nine o'clock Monday night and at that hour the wrecking train returned to this city, its work having been completed. From that time on trains have been running regularly. The middle track was cleared by night o'clock Monday morning and from that time until the outer track was cleared at night the middle track was used for both north and south bound trains. Until the middle track was cleared passengers were transferred around the wreck. The western trains were sent over the Harlem railroad.

Most of those who were injured in the wreck were doing nicely Monday and with the exception of the engineer and fireman who received fatal injuries, none of the others were seriously injured. William Purdy, of No. 288 Main Street, was one the Poughkeepsie people who was injured in the wreck. He suffered from shock and was quite badly bruised. He was so affected by the shock that he had to be put to bed Monday. Harry Burroughs, clerk for Allen Brothers was also in such a nervous condition that Dr. Powell thought it advisable to have him go to bed. Others injured included David Alverson of No. 11 Mansion Street, who was quite badly bruised and had a cut on his hand.

Harry Taylor, the short stop of the Poughkeepsie team, who was taken to the Highland Hospital at Fishkill after the accident suffering from bruises on the right leg and a wrenched hip, was unable to leave the hospital Monday. It is expected that he would be able to come home Monday as one of the players went down from here to get him but the doctors at the hospital would not let him move yet. Taylor did a brave act after the accident. Although suffering from terrible pain himself, he aided Miss Emma Doncette of Schenectady who had a five-year-old child in her arms in getting out of the car.

John Carstens (sic), the baggageman who received a deep cut on the wrist, went to Vassar Hospital Monday morning and had the wound dressed. He then left the hospital. His injury was not a serious one. His friends were congratulating him on all hands from his narrow escape from death. He went into the smoker from the baggage car to get a drink of water just before the wreck occurred. If he had remained in the baggage car he would have undoubtedly been killed as the baggage car was badly wrecked.

The other people from this city who were injured felt pretty stiff Monday but in no cases did serious results develop.

Just before the train ran into the landslide, it met a freight which passed on the south bound main track. The last car of the passenger train had just cleared the caboose of the freight when the accident occurred. If the freight had been a few seconds later the accident would have been a terrible one as the freight would have crashed into the passenger train. It is thought that the gravel fell from the cliff just before the train ran into it as men who were in the caboose of the freight say they heard gravel strike the car as they passed.

The Company Settling

Robert Wilkinson, attorney for the railroad company, was busy Monday, visiting the Poughkeepsians who were more or less injured in the wreck. Three of four of the ball players who received slight bruises were paid twenty-five dollars each. Two or three others refused to settle their cases for that amount and it looks as if there would be a series of suits brought against the company as a result of the wreck.

Additional articles in the Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle of July 31:

KILLED AT NEW HAMBURGH

Thomas Mulford, a flagman on the New York Central Railroad, was struck and instantly killed by the Empire State Express on Monday at New Hamburg while flagging trains to prevent them from running into the wreck of the Pacific Express.

THE DEAD VICTIMS

The body of Edward B. Wells, who was killed in the disaster at Chelsea has been taken to New York. The body was without any scars or bruises save on across the loins and one on the spine. It is believed the injury to the spine caused his death. The first impression of those who saw the injured engineer as he was lifted into the hospital ambulance at the Fishkill Landing depot, was that he would recover. He was a married man, but without children. He resided on West End Avenue, New York City. He had been in the employ of the Central Railroad for thirty years, rising from the position of engine wiper in the Grand Central yards to be a trusted engineer.

The body of Fireman Wellington Warren has also been taken to his home. Dr. Bontecou, who made an examination of the dead man's injuries, said he received enough wounds to have killed at least twenty men. The fireman was of magnificent physique, weighing probably 275 pounds, well proportioned. Very little can be learned about the fireman, beyond his name and the fact that he was a member of the Brotherhood of Firemen, and that he resided in Albany.

Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle

Tuesday, August 7, 1906

VERDICT ON THE WRECK

Railroad Commission orders Retaining Wall and Track Walker Near Chelsea

Albany, N.Y.- Aug. 6- The state board of railroad commissioners today reported on its investigation of the wreck of the Pacific Express near Chelsea on the New York Central division of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company one week ago last Sunday in which two lives were lost and several persons were injured. As a result, the board recommends that the company construct a retaining wall of sufficient height to prevent materials being washed from the side of the cut upon the track and that a regular track walker be employed there at all hours until the wall is completed.

Additional article from Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle of August 7 1906:

The accident at Chelsea a week ago Sunday night on the Hudson River Railroad provided

a bonanza for the restaurant in Pawling on the Harlem, over which many N.Y. Central trains were sent. About 60 quarts of milk and large quantities of edibles were sold on Monday, according to the Chronicle.



Photo of Wrecked Train Engine No. 3994

Wappingers Historical Society

The Scranton Republican

July 30, 1906

Reports are CONFLICTING three men drowned in lake.

NEW YORK, July 3 The Pacific express of the New York Central and Hudson river railroad which left here at 9:30 o'clock last night ran into a land slide at Chelsea, 11 miles south of Poughkeepsie, at 11:21 o'clock last night and was derailed. The engine rolled down the embankment along the Hudson River and the engineer, William Wells, and fireman Frank Werner, were missing at a late hour. It is thought that they went into the river and were drowned. It could not be learned just how many passengers had been killed and injured. The only communication with Chelsea was by the railroad telegraph and this was clogged with messages of the company. All the doctors in Poughkeepsie,

Fishkill landing and Mattewan were hurried to the scene of the wreck on special trains. One report from Poughkeepsie stated that the engine and three cars had gone over the bank and that many of the passengers had been killed and injured. The train was made up of ten sleepers, several day coaches and a baggage car. At the Grand Central depot it was said that the train was heavily loaded, nearly every berth on the sleepers being occupied. The dispatcher received word to send a relief train and doctors as soon as possible. But this order was countermanded before the train was made up. It was then said that the relief trains from Fishkill Landing, Mattewan and Poughkeepsie were..... heard some time after the wreck that three of the sleepers had left the track and that the engine had gone into the river. One report received at Poughkeepsie had nineteen dead and many injured. At the dispatchers office here it was said shortly before one o'clock this morning that only a few of the passengers had been hurt. Word was received at Mott Haven yards early this morning that five of the cars and the engine had left the track and that the dead and injured were being taken out with difficulty and several of the cars had toppled over. This report said that the body of the engineer had been found and that the baggage man was also killed. It was stated that none of the coaches had gone into the river. The dispatcher here heard about this time that none of the cars that left the track were Pullmans. The railroad employees about the depot said that this was hardly likely as almost the entire train was made up on Pullmans. The injured were placed in a and taken to the Fishkill hospital. The Pacific express went through Fishkill landing on time at 11:16 o'clock, according to the station agent at that place. The wrecked engine was number 3,994. Division Superintendent McCoy, who tends the Mott Haven yards on a special..... reported to the dispatcher here at 1:15 o'clock that he had reached the scene and that the engine was down the embankment and lying at the water's edge He said that five cars were off the track, but that all of the Pullmans had stuck to the rails. He said that it was impossible then to say how many had been injured as they were being hurried away to the Fishkill hospital as quickly as they could be extracted from the wreckage.

Poughkeepsie, July 30. A special train just left Chelsea for Fishkill Landing bearing twenty - five injured passengers from the Pacific expresses' wreck. Two of the injured are Edward Kelley, of Poughkeepsie, broken shoulder; Taylor, ballplayer on the Poughkeepsie baseball team, spine injured.