Four die when horse-drawn carriage meets Monon

LOOKING BACK
By Rose McIlveen

During the evolution of modern America there were times when our way of life seemed to be at odds with technological progress. In 1912, five young men tragically discovered that trains were more substantial than horse-drawn carriages.

The episode began on March 18, when a piece of machinery at the B.&B. bottle factory in Spencer broke down and most of the employees were given a one-day holiday.

Five of them decided to have a look at Bloomington and what it had to offer in the way of relaxation. The men, all glass-blowers, were Martin Warden originally from New Albany; Hal Brown of Spencer; Jesse Rodgers of Greenfield; Emmett Williams of Kansas City; and Arthur Farmer of Summittville. They rented a surrey in Spencer and rode in it to Bloomington.

The Daily Telephone of March 19 reported that the men had parked the surrey at the W.H. Bartlett livery barn on West Fifth Street between 6 and 7 in the evening.

Continued the newspaper, "While in Bloomington the men were drinking some but were not boisterous or disorderly at any time. None of the men were intoxicated while they were in town, and one of them, Martin Warden did not take a drink."

They picked up the surrey at about 11 p.m., when the saloons closed. As they left the livery barn the "storm curtains" were down, which would have restricted the view of the man holding the reins.

The horrible accident happened a mile south of Ellettsville. The surrey was struck by a Monon train, which was clipping along at about 55 miles per hour to make up lost time and was on the downgrade from the "Woodyards north."

Apparently the horses had already crossed the tracks, and the body of the surrey was situated over the tracks. Wooden vehicles are no match for a charging train engine. The engineer tried to stop, but it was impossible under the circumstances.

The momentum of the train carried it into Ellettsville, where the engineer reported what had happened. He may not have been aware as the train halted that one of the victims was hanging on the pilot or cowcatcher. That man was minus a foot.

Incredibly, Ellettsvillians wholly unconnected with the accident appeared on the scene. The train began to back down the track slowly with the brakeman holding a lantern.

As the *Telephone* put it, "For 45 minutes the train stood at the crossing while the crew, the Ellettsville men and passengers walked up and down the tracks searching for bodies."

With the exception of the man found on the cowcatcher, the young factory workers died of fractures of the skull and other injuries. The one man's foot was also found. When it was apparent that all of the victims had been found and placed in the baggage car of the train, it returned to Ellettsville.

The bodies were taken to the W.G. Hunter undertaking establishment. Meanwhile, the coroner, whose name was Kentling, made a logical determination. He was quoted in the *Telephone*. "After an investigation he decided that the accident was no fault of the railroad crew. It was his opinion that the men were driving along in a closed surrey and probably being unfamiliar with the road did not know of the crossing and were not looking for it."

There is another (to us) incredible aspect of the story. While the bodies were lying in state in the undertaking parlor, the citizens of Ellettsville were allowed to file through the room and look at the victims. Hunter had done his best to tidy them up, but it must have been gruesome.

Relatives were notified and funeral arrangements made. Arthur Farmer's family wanted his body, and it was put on the train for delivery to them. The superintendent of the bottle factory and the company president made arrangements for the other four men to be buried in Spencer.

The *Telephone* explained. "A subscription was taken among the employees and a cemetery lot bought."

That was the end of the story except for one detail. What happened to the horses?

One was unscathed, and the other was expected to recover from his injuries.

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