

1910 train wreck shows tragic power of 'iron horse'

When the train had just been invented, it was often referred to as "the iron horse." A still-young America was beginning to flex its commercial muscles, and the train was a boon to business and travel.

Unfortunately, in a direct confrontation between the iron horse and an older method of transportation, the latter was the loser. Such was the case one tragic morning in Brown County.

Thomas Kelso, a farmer, and his wife, Mary, had prospered in the Lick Creek area. On the summer morning of July 10, 1910, they had climbed into their buggy and head-



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By Rose McIlveen

ed toward church at Georgetown.

Others were on their way to somewhere — the others being passengers on the Indianapolis and Southern train, whose cars were dutifully following an engine along the rails through the Brown County countryside. They were all to meet

at a crossing near Helmsburg.

The *Bloomington Weekly Courier*, which reported the incident, gave it front-page coverage. The news story probably made some of the newspaper's readers queasy.

According to the *Courier*, the place where Kelso was attempting to cross was near a deep cut. In other words, as the train approached the crossing, the engineer did not have a clear view of it.

There was no way he could have stopped, and in the impact, Kelso's wooden buggy was no protection for him or his wife. Although most of the *Courier's* readers weren't

lacking in imagination, the reporter who covered the story supplied many grisly details.

"Kelso and his wife were tossed high into the air, falling immediately in front of the rushing train ... Kelso's head was crushed out of all human semblance from the shoulders up, his brains being scattered for several yards along the tracks and nearly every bone in his body broken."

The reporter continued, "Mrs. Kelso was decapitated, the head being severed at the shoulders as if done by a guillotine."

It was the train crew's job to re-

cover the remains of the Kelsos. All the legal bases were touched when the boxes containing their bodies were turned over to the Indianapolis and Southern Railroad agent at Helmsburg and the county coroner notified.

Even those who did not know the Kelsos personally were affected. Continued the *Courier*, "The accident cast a pall of gloom over Brown County when the news became known. Few men in that county were held in higher esteem than Thomas Kelso, a pioneer resident."

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