

# Working around the railroad took its toll

When a human body and a railroad locomotive try to occupy exactly the same spot, the body is no match for the locomotive. The newspapers printed between the 1860s and the 1930s relate many stories of the tragic consequences of such accidents. Within the space of 11 days two young men lost their lives on the railroad in Monroe County.

On July 3, 1906, the *Bloomington Telephone* ran the sad story of Cousie Brighton, who lived in Gosport and was careless about his own safety. According to the newspaper, Brighton had spent the evening in Stinesville drinking.

Explained the *Telephone*, "It was late when he started home, and it is believed that he became tired, sat down to rest and fall asleep." Unfortunately, he sat down on the railroad track.

Later, authorities tried to piece together what had happened to him. There were some missing pieces in the account, but they were filled in by educated guesses. "He was slightly deaf, and the approach of



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

a train failed to wake him from his fatal sleep. Just which train killed the man is not known, but it was either the midnight Chicago express or a freight that was running about 30 minutes ahead of it. Brighton was thrown some distance clear of the track and probably died instantly."

Since there were no witnesses to the accident, it was several hours before the body was found at 8:30 in the morning. Virgil and John Stewart notified the Monroe County coroner. The *Telephone* noted, "Sunday morning before the Stewart boys discovered the body, several persons passed along the tracks within a few feet of the body, but failed to see it."

An inquest was held, since the death was

a violent and unexpected one. Brighton's injuries were multiple — both arms broken, ankles crushed and "several bad bruises around the body." It is possible that he might have lived for several hours, but died of shock.

The man's inability to hear was not associated with old age. According to the newspaper, he was only 29 years old. Explained the *Telephone*, "Brighton's deafness, which probably caused his death, resulted from a dynamite explosion near Bedford several years ago. A car load of dynamite was exploded by a jar and several men were badly injured. Brighton was slightly hurt and his hearing impaired."

Eleven days later on Tuesday, Aug. 14, 1917, the *Telephone* carried a front-page headline which said, "CIRCUS MAN KILLED; A Colored 'Rouster' Struck and Crushed by Show Train." The article began, "Show day was not without its fatality, and Arthur Smith, a negro connected with the circus, was accidentally killed Saturday night by the show, though little is known of

the accident."

Piecing together what probably happened, the coroner came to the conclusion that Smith had helped to load the railroad cars and sat down to rest for awhile, falling asleep. Then the train was moved a few feet by a switch engine.

Continued the *Telephone*, "His moans at once brought assistance, and Dr. C.E. Harris was called, but he (Smith) was beyond medical aid and lived but a few minutes."

At the Hunter "undertaking office" the coroner discovered that Smith's abdomen had been crushed, but it was also determined that the wheels had not passed over his body. The *Telephone* concluded the article by noting, "The negro was about 30 years old and had been with the show only a few months, having joined the show in Virginia, and nothing is known of his relatives."

Concluded the newspaper, "The body is being held until today, and if not claimed by this evening, it will be turned over to the University medical school."

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