

Train mishaps spawn concern

Naturally, the first question that needed to be asked after the train wreck on Smithville Hill in 1890, was: What were two trains doing on the same track at the same time?

Engineer Charles Marvin of the freight engine, had said he was aware of the lateness of the passenger train. He believed he had 35 minutes to run four miles to the Harrodsburg switch and change to a side track to get out of the way.

According to the *Bloomington Telephone* of July 15, 1890, Marvin was only a mile from his objective. "Conductor Marvin's watch stopped at 7:30, and this fact strongly substantiates his story. The wreck occurred on a curve, and it is almost miraculous that half the passengers or more were not killed."

Three days later the newspaper reported that officers of the Monon were reluctant to talk about the cause of the wreck. A hint of why the officials had lost their voices can be found in the July 18 edition of the *Telephone*: "Engineer (Harry) Whitsell (engineer of the freight engine) belonged on the first division and did not know the road well on the second division; and then he probably forgot that there was such a train as the accom-



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modation."

The newspaper quoted "one man," who was either a railroad employee or an informed bystander: "He (Whitsell) have taken the siding at Smithville, and if the conductor's watch stopped, he should have sent out flagmen and waited until the first train came along. The Monon is in a bad streak of luck now. I think they are trying to run the road with too few men. If a flagman had been sent back before the Providence disaster it would have never occurred."

The other wreck probably was part of the reason why Monon officials were so reticent. But the *Telephone* rushed in where angels fear to tread, journalistically speaking, and declared that the wreck at Providence (south of Salem) was also the result of human error. In that disaster, two trains at least partially on

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