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Incident occurred on June 13, 1929

BOY, MAN KILLED IN HOOPER WRECK

15 cars pile up on bridge over bathing pool

Roy Bennett Bishop, 11, Buried Under Blazing Tank Car

FOUR BOYS INJURED

William Wilcox, Trapped by Liquid Fire, Seeking Uninjured Son

An 11 year-old boy was instantly killed, four playmates were injured and a man was fatally burned early last night when 15 cars of a westbound Erie freight train piled up on the Patterson Creek bridge at Hooper, under which the boys were playing.

Roy Bennett Bishop, 11, of Hooper, was hurled to his death from the bridge by flaming wreckage which buried him.

William T. Wilcox, 55, of Clinton Street, Endwell died in Ideal Hospital in Endicott at 8:40 o'clock this morning from burns. He was caught in a wave of blazing gasoline from two tank cars which tipped over. The flaming fluid covered the creek from 500 to 1,000 feet. Wilcox had gone to the bridge in search of his son, who was playing with the other boys. The son, Thelbert, 14, escaped injury.

The injured boys are:

- Earl Richard, 11, son of Mr. and Mrs. C.E. Richard of Endwell, struck by a flying stone.
- Arthur Groat, 9, of Carmel Grove, cut on the forehead.
- Alfred Hiney, 12, cut under the right eye.
- Wilson Adams of Night Ave., Endwell, burned under the arms and cut on the head.

Dale Groat, 6, brother of Arthur and Harold Kalor, 11, of Argonne Ave., Endwell were not injured.

The wreck, the exact cause of which remained undetermined this afternoon, caused damage of \$250,000 and was followed by a spectacular fire, which firemen from Endwell, Binghamton, Johnson City and Endicott fought for more than seven hours.

Traffic was resumed over the west bound track shortly after 2 o'clock this afternoon.

The body of the Bishop boy, the son of Mrs. Stephen Schaeffer of the Grays Crossing-Endicott Road, was discovered at 6:07 o'clock this morning, just 11 hours after the wreck, beneath a still-blazing gasoline tank car.



Roy's mother had sent him to Endwell for groceries and in returning he took to the railroad tracks instead of the highway. When he reached the bridge, the other boys said, he sat down in the middle of the span to watch them at their play on the bank of the creek, in which some of them had been swimming. As the train approached, the boys said, Bishop stepped out to the end of the middle stringer of the bridge, to which he was clinging by his hands when they last saw him.

Wilcox met his death while seeking his son, who already had fled the scene in the creek. The boy returned in time to see Manley Smith, 19, of Avenue B, Endwell and Gardner Stack, 22, of Endwell, strip the burning clothing from his father, before he was rushed to the hospital in an automobile.

Wilcox is believed to have waded into the creek just before the gasoline covering the surface burst into flames. He was trapped in a veritable sea of fire as the

blazing fluid spread with lightening speed along the creek and along the flat lands.

While Manley Smith was aiding in the rescue of Wilcox, his brother, Robert, dragged the Richard boy to safety on the opposite side of the bridge.

"I saw Bennett Bishop standing along the side of the bridge, hanging to the top part and leaning way out when the train came, young Richard said.

"The next thing was a crash and I didn't see Bennett any more. I was sitting on a flat rock at the northeast end of the bridge and I ran across the creek and grabbed my clothes from under a box car, which had fallen over the bridge. I started to run and the next thing I knew something hit me. I saw the other boys running away, too."

2 KILLED, FOUR HURT IN HOOPER TRAIN WRECK
15 cars of Erie Freight Pile up on Bridge Over
Swimming Hole
BOYS AND MAN DIE
Youngsters Playing Under Span injured;
Father Fatally Burned Seeking Son

Smith was among the men who, with Endwell firemen, rushed to the scene immediately after the first alarm.

The boy was running about aimlessly when Smith grasped him just as a sheet of flames swept for 1,000 feet northward up the creek, past where he had been standing.

"I ducked low and ran," Smith said, "as the flames rolled over me."

Edward Pfaff of Union R.D.1, first spread the alarm that the Bishop boy might have been killed. He was passing in his automobile a few minutes after the wreck. He stopped, picked up the Richard boy and took him to the Endicott Johnson dispensary at Endicott.

Young Richard, although suffering from shock, told that the Bishop boy had been on the bridge when the crash came. Pfaff sped to Mrs. Schaeffer's home where he learned that Ray had failed to return. He then took the mother and husband to the scene of the wreck where they sought vainly to find the boy among the thousands who had gathered.

Pfaff then reported to Lieutenant Frank O'Dea of the Erie police, who in turn, informed Sergeant

Joseph A. Murphy of the state police, then engaged in a check up of the boys.

Sergeant Murphy went to the home of young Richard, who had been put to bed and questioned him. The boy repeated the story he had told Pfaff.

Search was begun immediately among such of the wreckage of toppled and blazing cars as could be approached. Firemen were pouring water from three lines into the blaze and volunteers had begun dragging a deep hole in the creek beneath the bridge.

Young Bishop was swept from his position on the bridge and buried beneath the wreckage of one tank car and several box cars. There his body was found this morning. He died instantly police believe.

A number of Endwell firemen under Chief Clarence Beckwith, who had been playing a stream from the northwest side of the creek, ran just in time to miss the spray of liquid fire as the overturned tank cars burst into flame.

Continuous sounding of the fire siren spread consternation among the residents of Endwell and Endicott as the flames shot skyward more than 100 feet and great clouds of smoke darkened the sky.

Additional alarms were sent at once to Endicott, Johnson City and Binghamton. Fire Chief Charles Huber of Endicott, with the Central station crew there, was second to respond. He stretched a line from a hydrant on Avenue B north of the railroad. Chief James R. Eldridge with the Johnson City Central station crew next arrived being followed closely by Engine company 2 from Binghamton, under Chief Elmer Brown and Battalion Chief Frank J. Buckman, who stretched line of hose and coupled it to the Johnson City pumper, which had connected to a hydrant at Main Street and Avenue B.

All three lines were more than 1,000 feet in length, but ample pressure aided in confining the blaze to the burning cars. The firemen were powerless to check the blazing tank cars, which continued to burn furiously.

As word of the wreck spread, thousands of automobiles clogged the main arteries of traffic leading from the east and west, into Endwell. Troopers Elkins and Keown kept the lines on the main highway in motion, but hundreds of cars parked in every available space in the vicinity and their occupants crowded for points of vantage, some close

to the wreck and others on nearby elevations of ground.

The police estimate that at least 10,000 visited the scene or came as close as traffic conditions would permit.

Collapse of some part of the under structure of one of the forward cars in the wrecked section, about 10 cars back from the locomotive, may have caused the wreck.

Railroad officials declined today to place a definite cause of the accident, other than to say that some part of a car must have dropped as the train passed the Hooper crossing, 400 feet east of the bridge. Marks on the tracks about 100 feet east of the bridge showed where the first car left the rails and swung over to the eastbound track, which was torn up.

The railroad officials are endeavoring, it was learned, to trace a report that a motorist, waiting on the south side of the tracks at Gray's Crossing, saw a journal on one of the cars burning as the train passed the crossing.

Included in the cars that buckled was a twin load of three heavy hemlock timbers, about 75 feet long, strung on two gondolas. One theory is that these cars, being more or less tightly held by the long timbers, failed to negotiate the sharp curve just east of the Hooper crossing, causing a part of one of the trucks to drag.

J. T. Murphy of Binghamton, division trainmaster, was one of the first railroad officials to arrive on the scene. He immediately telephoned for wrecking crews from Hornell and Susquehanna. The Susquehanna crew arrived at 8:40 o'clock. Before their arrival more than 10 men had pushed back from the blaze 10 cars and the caboose, which had they become ignited would have carried the flames to a feed store owned by Fred Westcott at Hooper, and to adjoining residents.

R. T. Davis, Delaware division engineer, in charge of the wrecker, directed attempts to repair the bridge. Other officials soon on the job were M. T. Reap, general yardmaster and Section Foremen William Stetson.

It became evident early that the north side of the bridge was a hopeless mass of twisted steel and all

Scenes at Erie Freight Wreck on Bridge at Endwell



efforts were extended on the eastbound tracks in an effort to open one way traffic. Meanwhile trains were routed over the Lackawanna at Binghamton and Elmira.

With the arrival of Trainmaster Murphy a checkup of the cars involved in the wreck was begun. Besides the two tank cars of gasoline and another of molasses and the timbers, they included cars of hides, potatoes, sewing machines, steel beds, band steel, band iron, ball bearings, copper tubing, sodium, and three cars of miscellaneous merchandise.

Unofficial estimate of the shipments totally destroyed in the wreck have been placed at \$75,000. Replacement of the bridge, constructed in 1902, will cost from \$25,000 to \$50,00 and the rolling stock will add another \$40,000, it is stated. In addition, the road faces loss through claims for delayed shipments, particularly of perishable products destined for New York.

J.D. Reheel, division superintendent and H. A. Adams, assistant general manager of the Erie, arrived at the wreck at 3 o'clock this morning, by automobile, about the same time as the Hornell wrecking crew, with material for repairing the south side of the bridge.

Accompanying the wrecker were J. J. Gibson, master carpenter, R. M. Graves, senior trainmaster of the division and Blair Blowers, division engineer.



Above, general view of blazing freight cars piled in mass of wreckage following derailment of Erie train at Endwell. Below, gasoline escaping from broken tank car burned with intensity of gigantic blow torch. Inset, Roy Bennett Bishop, 11 years old, who was killed in wreck.

on the south side grass and bushes were burned over a wide area.

The home of U. L. Rought, 56 Pearl Street, escaped destruction by fire only because it was roofed and sided by slate coated shingles. Only a few hundred feet from the blazing pile the surface of the dwelling was blistered. Rought suffered the loss of furniture which volunteers removed from the house and which was partly destroyed.

The charred form of the Bishop boy was discovered by Patsy Pingirill, a member of the Susquehanna wrecking crew, as other workmen and volunteer searchers from Endwell worked their way into the wreckage.

The body was lodged close to the center pier of the bridge, partly covered by a large piece of masonry which had cracked off and fallen down. It was directly under one of the tank cars which still was emitting flames.

Pingirill was aided by Arthur Stiles of Endwell, Davis, Graves and Orr Lawrence, another member of the wrecking crew, bringing the body out.

For an hour before that an attempt had been made to lower the water level in the hole under the bridge, a few feet east of the pier, by digging a drainage ditch and using a motor driven bilge pump. manned by workmen from the Endicott Johnson plants in charge of Howard Hubbard.

Coroner J. Edgar Doig of Endicott who was notified, viewed the body and ordered its removal to the undertaking parlors of J. Rennie Allen, Endicott. Funeral announcements will be made later.

Endwell firemen were called to the wreck twice this morning when the remains of the gasoline blazed up. They answered a call at 4 o'clock and another at 7:20, when the wrecking crane dumped one of the tanks from the bridge into the creek bed causing it to explode and sending the flames skyward. No damage resulted however.

The train was No. 91, a fast freight, containing about 60 cars. It was in charge of Conductor A. O. Boyle of Hornell with J.E. Martin, flagman, and Lee Mc Chessney and L. J. Kelly, all of Hornell, brakeman. The engine was one of the heavy 320 type, no. 3276, with Manley Latham of Waverly as engineer and H. L. Meyers, Hornell, fireman.

The forward end of the train dragging one box car from which the rear truck had been torn, proceeded a quarter of a mile west of the bridge, before the automatic air brakes halted it.

"When I looked back, the wreck was a mass of flames and the flames were roaring into the sky, declared Latham."

The fire did not start in the tanks of gasoline, in the opinion of many of the Endwellites who heard the crash and saw the first spurt of fire. The blaze appeared to originate in a car ahead of the two tank cars, but burned quickly. The remains of steel barrels with the heads blown open on one of the box cars indicated that they contained some highly volatile substances, which may have speeded the course of the flames.

Vegetation for a considerable distance north of the bridge, along the creek bed, showed clearly today how the devastating flames swept forward. Similarly

FATHER SACRIFICES HIS LIFE IN ATTEMPT TO FIND HIS SON

When William T. Wilcox emerged from the seething furnace of the wreckage at the Patterson Creek bridge, near Hooper, last night, where he sacrificed his life as he sought vainly to find his boy, he appeared as a "moving pillar of fire", according to Frank B. Kirchgraber, 4 Marne Ave., Endwell, an automobile salesman, who was an eye witness to the tragedy.

Kirchgraber was standing near the Methodist Episcopal Church, 500 yards away, but said he saw clearly what happened.

"First came the terrible explosion, which sprayed flaming gasoline over a wide area in my direction," Kirchgraber said. "Then I saw this flaming figure come out of the bushes which line the creek. I knew it to be a man although it looked like a moving pillar of fire.

"The human torch ran a short distance and I with others ran toward him. As I came forward, Wilcox dropped to the ground and rolled over two or three times.

"Wilcox's clothing was still blazing when the first of us reached the scene. We tore away the remains of a pair of trousers more than half burned and part of his shirt and underwear. While we worked over him he did not utter a sound of pain or complaint. He appeared to be conscious all the time."

"The clothing removed, we wrapped him in a blanket, put him in a private car and took him to the hospital."

Wilcox never had a chance, as he ran, heedlessly forward toward the blazing wreck. The seeping gasoline had covered the surface of the water and the deadly gas was already forming rapidly to ignite in a flash that enveloped him in flames.

While he plunged forward, his boy, already greatly frightened by his narrow escape from the cascading cars and not suspecting that the destructive fire would follow, ran to safety by another route, which led along the creek and out of his father's sight.

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