

# The Wreck of the Old 97

The Story and the Song

# Background

- Train number 97 was the *Fast Mail* that ran from New York to New Orleans
- Southern took the train from Washington to Atlanta
- 97 was the fastest train on the Southern Railway at the time of the wreck
- There was no northbound counterpart for this train, no number 96 on the Southern

# Background

- There was a 96 out of New Orleans on the Louisville and Nashville
- Both L&N and the West Point Route carried passengers on 97
- Old 97 should not be confused with train 38, later known as the Crescent Limited

# Fame

- The Wreck of the Old 97 is one of the two most famous wrecks in US railroad history
- The other is Casey Jones on the Illinois Central
- This is due the existence of a song about both wrecks
- Without the songs, both wrecks would most likely be all but forgotten today

# When

- Sunday, September 27, 1903, around 3:00 pm

# The Engineer

- Engineer Joe “Steve” Broady
  - Believed to have gone by “Steve” because of a Steve Broady who had jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge



# Engine 1102



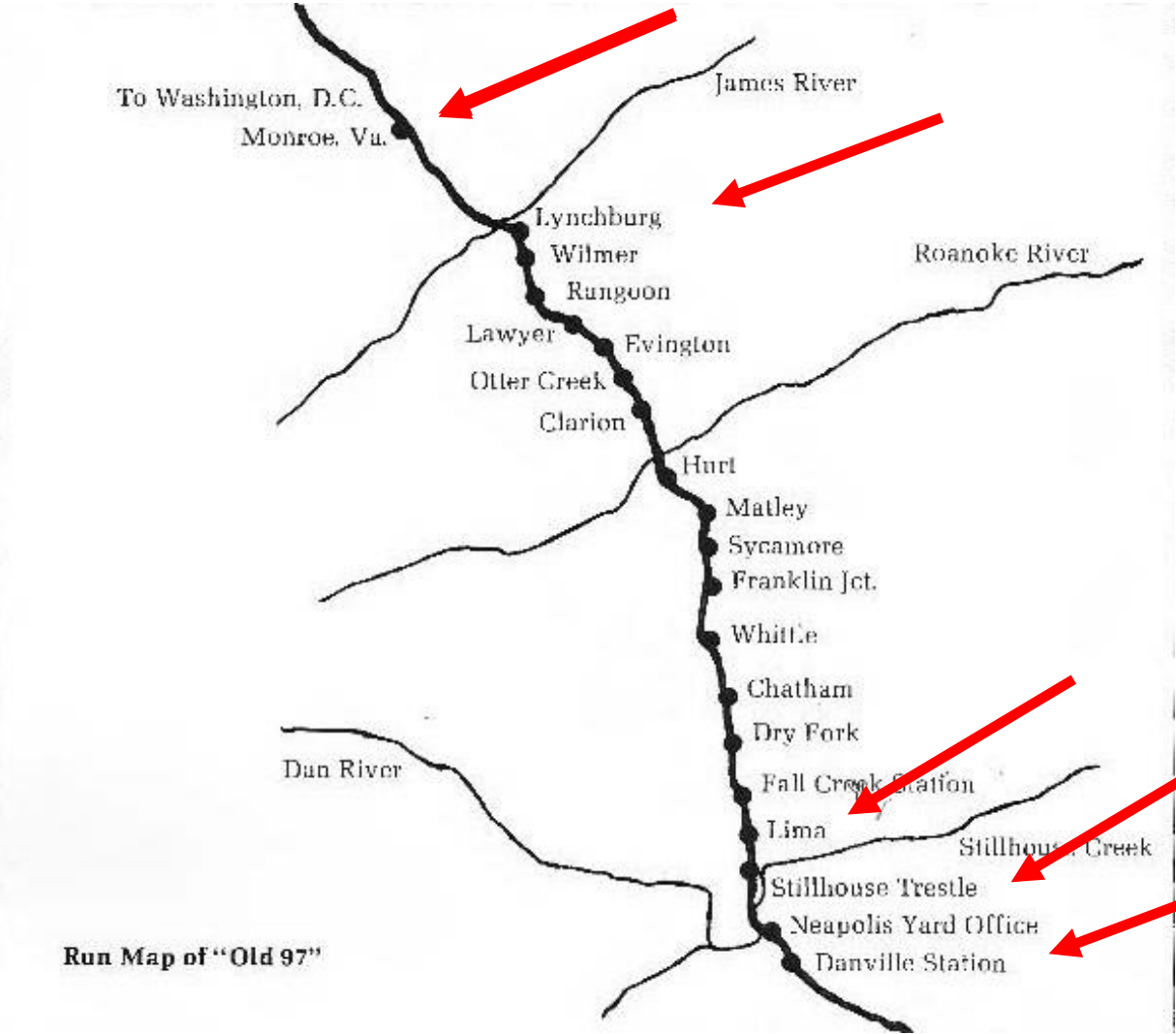
- Class F14 Heavy Ten Wheeler
  - 4-6-0
- Built by Baldwin in 1903
- Had only been in service 36 days at the time of the wreck
- Rebuilt after the wreck and later renumbered SR 1134
- Scrapped in July 1935 in Princeton, IN

# The Consist

- Two railway post office cars
- One express car
- One baggage car for the storage of mail



# The Route



# Key Locations

- Monroe, VA
  - First crew change point south of Washington, DC
  - This is where Broady took over as engineer of Old 97
- Lima, VA
  - The location of the three-mile grade
- Stillhouse Trestle
  - The location of the wreck

# The Destination

- Spencer, NC
  - Next crew change point
  - 166 miles distant from Monroe
- Southern Railway was penalized for every minute the *Fast Mail* was late into Spencer

# The Song

- While there have been many versions of the Wreck of the Old 97, the recording by Vernon Dalhart in 1924 is said to be first Country song to sell over a million copies.
  - This version brought the wreck into national prominence
- Because there are many different versions of the song, the lyrics vary from one version to another
- All are a combination of facts and poetic license
- These are the words most commonly used by groups in which I have played

# The Song



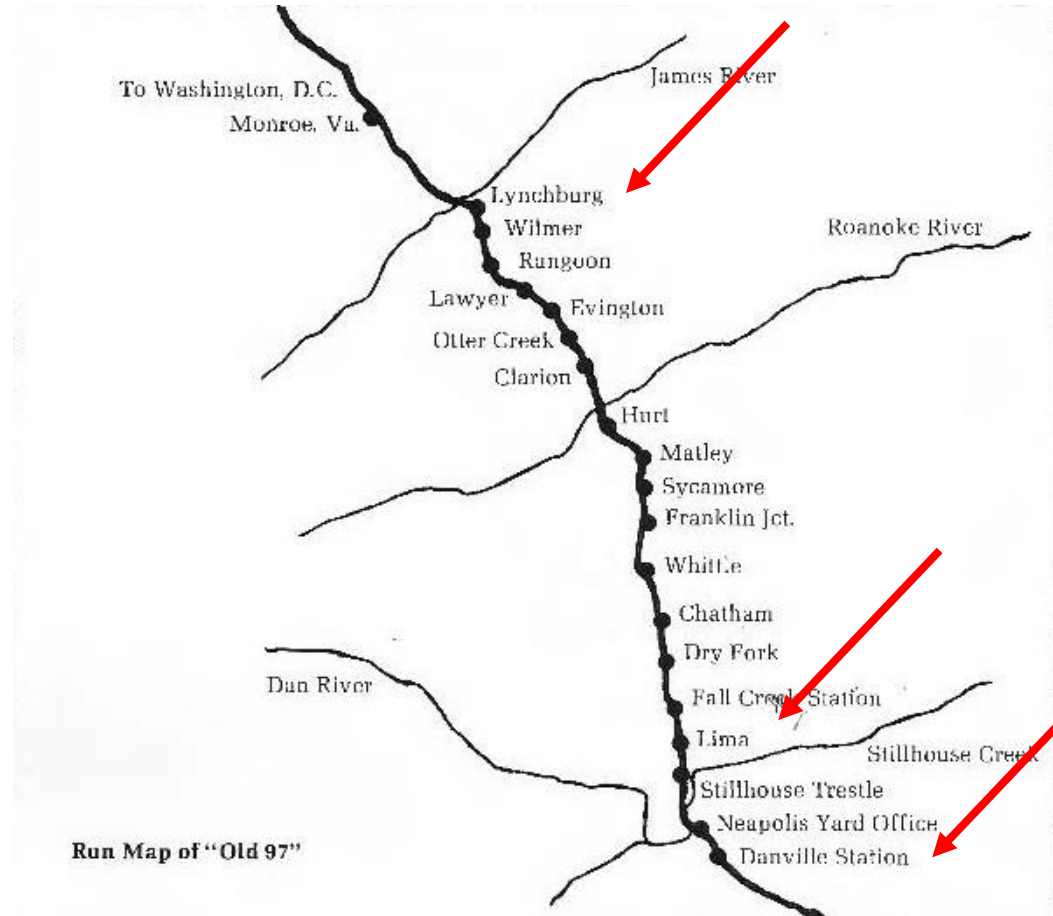
- They gave him his orders in Monroe Virginia
- Saying Steve, you're way behind time
- This is not 38 but it's Old 97
- You must put her into Spencer on time

# The Song



- He turned around and said to his fireman
- Shovel in a little more coal
- And when we cross that White Oak mountain
- You can watch Old 97 roll

# The Song



- It's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville
- And at Lima there's a three-mile grade
- It was on this grade that he lost his airbrakes
- And you see what a jump he made

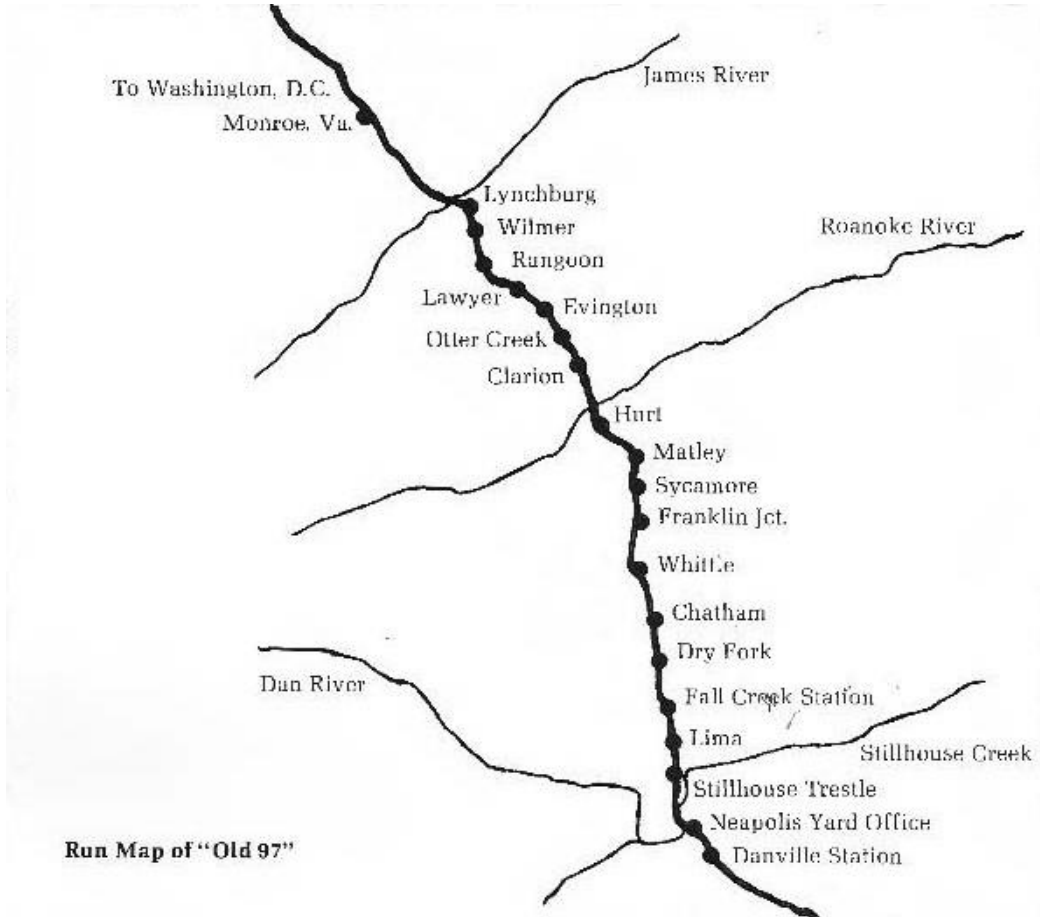
# The Song



- He was going down the grade making 90 miles an hour
- When his whistle broke into a scream
- He was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle
- Scalded to death by the steam

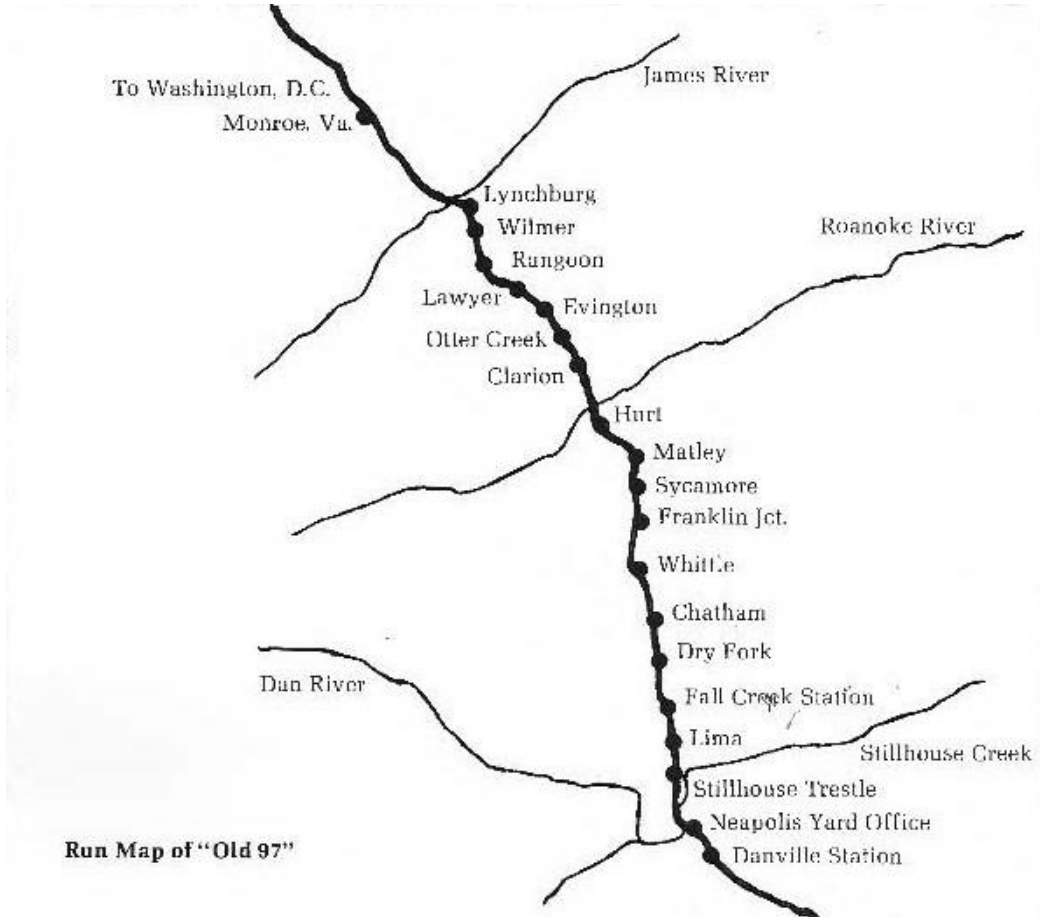


# The Song



- The telegram came to Washington City
- And this is how it read
- The brave engineer that ran Old 97
- Is lying in old Danville dead

# The Song



- Now ladies you must all take warning
- From this time now and on
- Never speak harsh words to your true loving husband
- He may leave you and never return

# True Ups

- The speed was estimated to be more in the range of 50 mph rather than 90 mph
- Broady's body was found thrown from the engine, lying in the creek
- It is speculated that a flange on a wheel on the engine broke when it struck the curve
- Pushed by the four cars in the train, the engine started across the trestle running a distance on the ties before plunging 45 feet into the water below

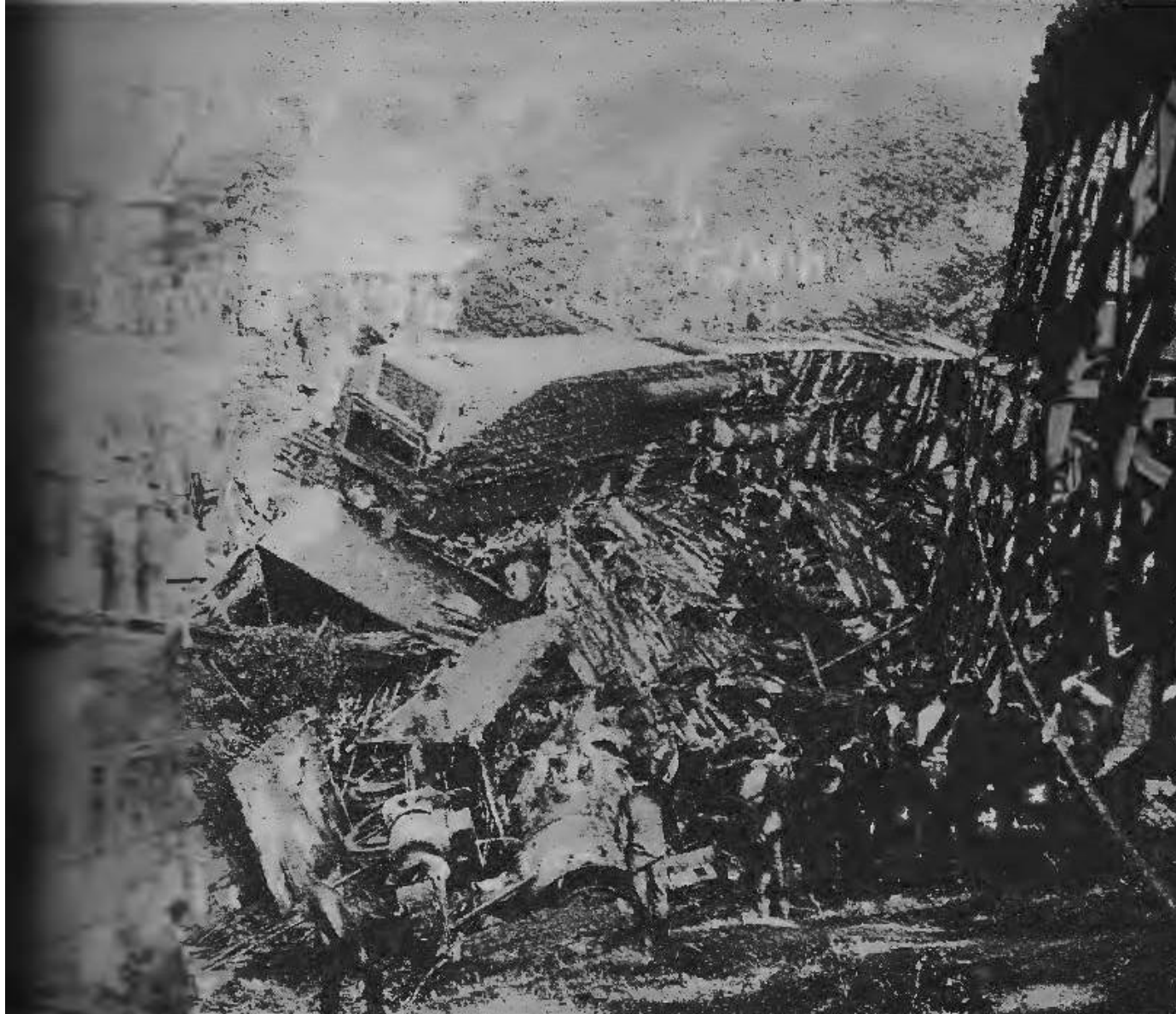
About an hour after the wreck looking West



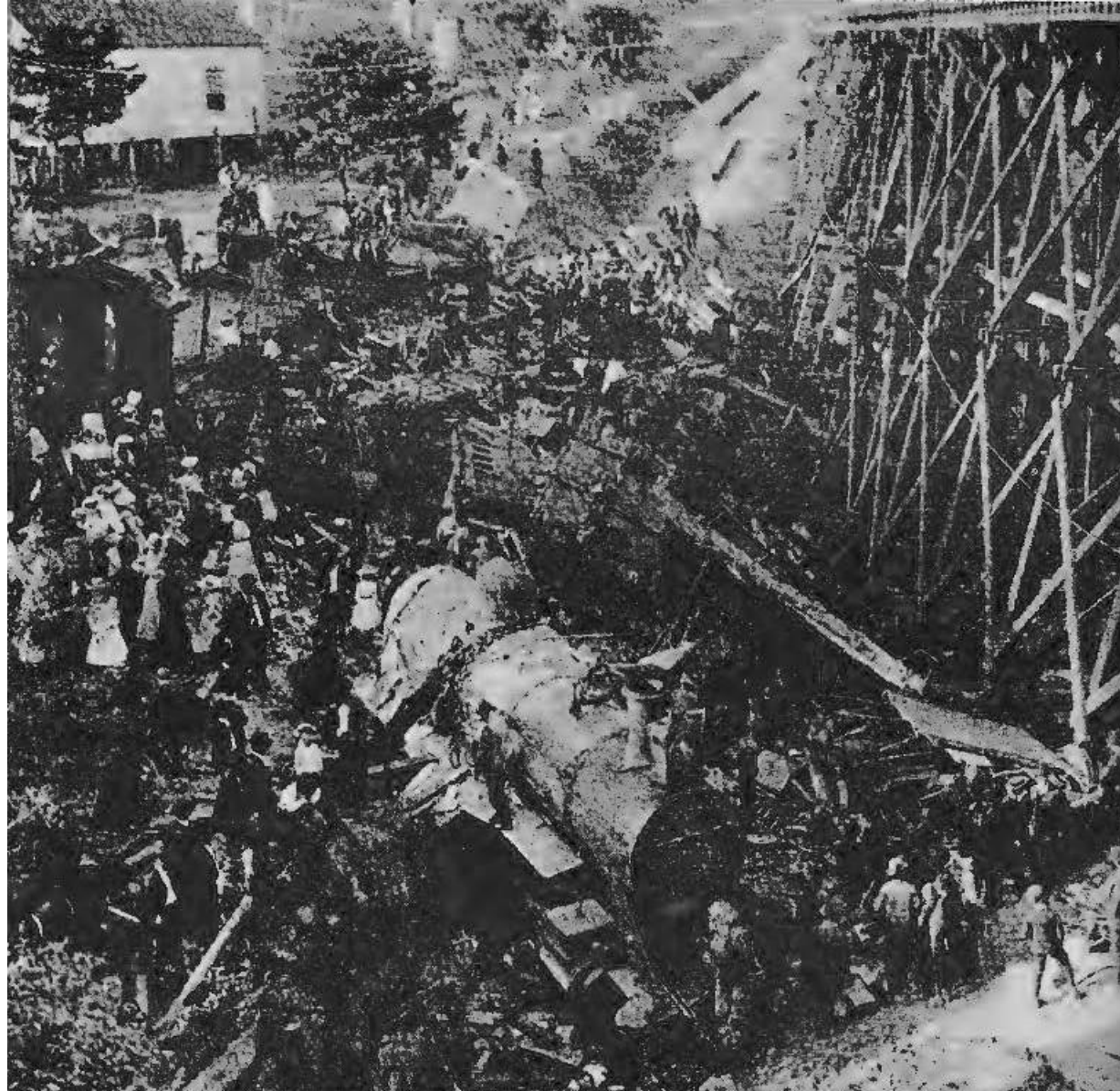
Looking East, Notice Smoke & Steam



# Work Continues on Monday Morning



# Engine Ready for Removal on Thursday



# Killed in the Wreck - 11

- Engineer Joseph A. Broady ..... Dead at the Scene
- Fireman A.D. Clapp ..... Dead at the Scene
- Apprentice Fireman Hodge ..... Dead at the Scene
- Conductor J. Thomas Blair ..... Dead at the Scene
- Flagman J.R. Moody ... ..... Dead at the Scene
- Safe Locker Wentworth Armistead ..... Dead at the Scene
- Postal Clerk J.L. Thompson ..... Dead at the Scene
- Postal Clerk W.S. Chambers ..... Dead at the Scene
- Postal Clerk D.P Flory ..... Dead at the Scene
- Postal Clerk P.M. Argenbright ..... Dead at the Scene
- Postal Clerk L. W. Spies ..... Died of shock on October 6, 1903



# Injured in the Wreck - 7

- Postal Clerk J.J. Dunlap . . . . . Survived
- Postal Clerk J. Harris Thompson . . . . . Survived
- Postal Clerk N.C. Maupin . . . . . Survived
- Postal Clerk Charles E. Reams . . . . . Survived
- Postal Clerk Percival Indermauer . . . . . Survived
- Postal Clerk Frank F. Brooks . . . . . Survived

# Survived Without Injury

- Express Messenger W.F. Pinkney was the only one to escape without a scratch
- He decided that one train wreck would last him for a whole lifetime and that he wasn't going to take any more chances
- He went directly to his home in Charlotte, N.C., and wrote out his resignation that same day