

# WRECK-VICTIMS SEVENTEEN

## Two More of Lehigh Valley Passengers Die at Plainfield.

### THE RAILROAD RESPONSIBLE

Supt. Sprigg, However, Cannot Say Who Was Directly to Blame—An Inquest May Not Be Held.

The list of deaths resulting from the head-on collision of two passenger trains on the Lehigh Valley Railroad, near West Duncellen, Monday afternoon, was increased by two yesterday. J. Josephs and A. Allgier, a tailor, both of Mount Carmel, Penn., died at the Muhlenberg Hospital, at Plainfield, N. J. It was given as the opinion of the physicians at the hospital where the more seriously injured were taken that the list is likely to grow. Of the seventeen dead only two remain wholly unidentified, a man and a woman, lying at an undertaking establishment at Bound Brook.

Who was to blame for the accident has not yet been settled, or if it is known to the railroad officials it has not been made public. All that is acknowledged by officials of the road is that somebody blundered in allowing two trains to get on the single track going in opposite directions at practically the same moment. No investigation is being made, they say, and none will be made until the dead and wounded are cared for. The lips of the engineers of the wrecked trains, the telegraph operators, and switchmen who might be expected to explain the cause of the catastrophe were practically sealed yesterday. The information they gave out amounted to nothing, and they directed their questioners to officials of the company higher in authority.

The Lehigh Valley Railroad was represented yesterday in matters relating to the accident by W. O. Sprigg, Superintendent of the Easton Division, which extends from Easton, Penn., to Jersey City. He has been near the scene of the accident since it occurred, engaged in looking after the multitude of details that his position calls for. His private car was side-tracked at Bound Brook all day, where he has temporary headquarters, with a special telegraph wire running to the car. He had little to say concerning the accident that has not already been said.

"My first duty," he said, "is to look after the dead and wounded. I have given all my time thus far to that work. After it is attended to, we will make an investigation looking toward fixing the responsibility for the accident. Thus far no employe of the road has been discharged, or even suspended, as a result of the collision. At the present time the responsibility all rests with me."

When it was suggested that the block system of signalling, by which an engineer could tell at various points along the track whether or not the way was clear, and which was ostensibly in use on the Lehigh Valley Road, was in reality but a makeshift and might have been negatively the cause of the collision, Mr. Sprigg grew angry. He admitted, however, that only about thirty miles of block signals were in use throughout the distance between Jersey City and Easton, Penn. "If there had been a block system every four feet," he added, "the fact would not have prevented the accident. The responsibility for the accident, however, rests with this company. Orders had been sent to South Plainfield to allow no trains to move westward until further orders."

#### MAY HOLD NO INQUEST.

Superintendent Sprigg refused to state what would be the method of procedure on the part of the railroad officials to fix the blame on employe or employes of the company, and refused to discuss the subject further. He held a consultation during the day with County Physician Samuel Long of Middlesex County, who really takes precedence over Coroner Charles Moke on occasions of this kind. Dr. Long stated later that it was doubtful if any inquest would be held into the killing of the seventeen persons in the wreck.

"The railroad officials, I believe, will assume the responsibility for the accident," he said. "The law directs the holding of an inquest only when the cause of death is in doubt. I am quite sure of the cause of death in this case. I will meet the officials of the road to-morrow at some point not yet agreed upon, and if the road will assume the responsibility for the deaths there will be no inquest. If there is a Coroner's investigation it will be held in New Brunswick. Whether or not there is an inquest, however, I will lay the result of my investigations before the county prosecuting attorney and the matter will be laid before the Grand Jury. If it is found that the accident was due to criminal negligence on the part of any person or persons an indictment will follow." Coroner Moke concurred in Dr. Long's opinion of the case.

Harry Rutland, the operator at South Plainfield, claims he was not responsible for the wreck and that he had no orders to hold back the local train. He had been on duty but a short time, having relieved another operator at noon, and if orders were given to his predecessor to hold all west-bound trains at that point, he did not deliver them to his relief. He said yesterday that he felt confident that the investigation would clear him.

When he took charge the sheet showed the Bound Brook local as being forty-six minutes late. It left South Plainfield at 12:30. He claims to have looked over the records and is positive there was no order to hold the local or any other train. He maintains that he obeyed every order he received or found on file. He will not say more than this, as he says he was warned by the railroad officials not to talk, but sticks to his statement because, he says, he is innocent of any mistake.

The operator's story is held by railroad men to throw the blame on the dispatcher's office. The man whom Rutland relieved had been on duty since he relieved Rutland, at midnight Sunday night. He may have been sleepy and tired, and with the rush of work on hand as a result of the blocking of one of the tracks of the road, and may have carried the order in his head and held trains all right, but forgot to transcribe the order and also to tell his relief of its existence. Men who have been in similar positions say this happens very often.

#### TRACES OF WRECK REMOVED.

The traces of the wreck were removed during Monday night, and the ground had been covered with fresh earth to hide the stains of blood. The only trace yesterday exhibited to the crowds of curious ones was a heap of ashes, where the kindling wood to which the first car of the express had been reduced was burned. Trains were running on time, and nothing unusual appeared to have occurred.

At Bound Brook the work of identifying the dead continued. At the little undertaking shop of Powelson & Co. thirteen bodies were stretched on as many cots, and the little extra space in the house of the dead was filled throughout the day by the anxious, the morbid, and the curious. The Lehigh started a train out from Mount Carmel, Penn., in the morning and picked up prominent men from different places to come to the scene and try and establish the identity of the dead. Chief of Police Morgan of Mount Carmel came from that place with several others. They identified a number, confirmed the identification of others, and made partial recognition of others.

The run of hard luck which came upon the Lehigh with the birth of the new year continued yesterday, and the special containing the identifiers speeding toward Bound Brook cut short a life. James Bond, foreman of a gang of carpenters employed by the road, was at work on the bridge just outside of Bound Brook, and as the special crossed the bridge he failed to avoid it. He was instantly killed.

At the close of the day Coroner Moke made out this list of the identified dead at Bound Brook and Plainfield:

#### BOUND BROOK.

- HELLER, JACOB, of Mount Carmel, tailor, aged thirty-five years.
- JARVIS, JOHN, of Mount Carmel, aged sixteen years.
- KEENAN, —, of Mount Carmel, fifty-five years old.
- KEISER, ABNER S., of Pottsville, Penn., carpet dealer, thirty-five years old.
- KOHAN, THEODORE F., thirty years old, of Shamokin, Penn.
- LEADER, W. C., of Mount Carmel, twenty-five years old, son of dry goods merchant.
- MARKEL, WILLIAM H., of Shamokin, Penn., aged twenty-three, a printer.
- PARRISH, Mrs. C., Shenandoah, Penn.
- RYBECKI, FRANK, of Mount Carmel, shoe dealer.
- SMINKEY, Miss —, Shamokin, Penn.
- WEIKEL, RUFUS, forty years old, a shoemaker, of Shamokin, Penn.

#### PLAINFIELD.

- ALLGIER, A., of Mount Carmel, Penn.
- HINKLE, WILLIAM H., of Shamokin, Penn., contractor, aged forty years.
- JOSEPHS, J., Mount Carmel, Penn.

WEIKEL, H. E., of Mount Carmel, artist, thirty-five years old.

This leaves a man and woman unidentified at the Bound Brook undertakers' shop.

#### ENGAGED COUPLE KILLED.

Miss Sminkey and Josephs were identified by a relative of the latter, a resident of Plainfield, and the identification brought out a pathetic romance. The two had been sweethearts for years, and were coming to New York to be married. The bodies of eight victims, residents of Mount Carmel, were prepared for burial at the railroad's expense yesterday afternoon, and were taken on a special train to the homes of their relatives.

The patient at the Muhlenberg Hospital whose condition is most critical is the four months old infant of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Borrica, who are also patients at the institution. The child's head is crushed. There was a steady stream of callers at the hospital, relatives and friends of the injured. Many Plainfield women are assisting in the care of the wounded.

Engineer Pendergast of the Hazleton express had recovered sufficiently to go to his home. Engineer Rick of the Bound Brook Local is seriously injured, and may die, as his fractured ribs have penetrated his lungs. Both engineers refused yesterday to make any comment on the wreck.

#### A PASSENGER'S EXPERIENCE.

A vivid story of a personal experience in the wreck was told yesterday by G. W. Woodford, who lives in Ticonderoga, N. Y., and is a traveling agent for a Philadelphia book-publishing house.

He got on the train by the merest chance at Bound Brook, and had hardly got settled in his seat, having not yet paid his fare, when the crash came.

"I had been to Somerville on business," said Mr. Woodford, "and having an affair to attend to at Bound Brook, rode down there on a trolley car early in the morning. I had finished my work there and was about to take a noon train for New York, as I wanted to call on my brother, who lives in Brooklyn. Some one told me of the freight wreck near Bound Brook in the morning, however, and I concluded to go and have a look at it. While gazing at the wreckage the thought came over me, 'What a terrible thing it would have been if the train had carried passengers instead of freight.'"

"I returned to the Bound Brook Station in about half an hour, and just then the excursion train came along. I ran to catch it, without stopping to buy a ticket, and entered the rear car.

"The conductor had not yet come after my fare, when suddenly there was a deafening crash, and the train stopped as suddenly as if it had been dashed against the side of a mountain. I was lifted bodily from my seat and thrown at least ten feet straight forward, alighting in another seat, and getting up without even a scratch or a bruise.

#### ALL IN REAR CAR HURT.

"There were not more than eight or ten people in the rear car. Two of them were women, but I don't think there were any children. All seemed to be injured in some way and some were badly hurt, being knocked unconscious or painfully cut and bruised. One man had both his legs broken, and others had an arm or a leg fractured. The car immediately filled with steam, and I got outside as quickly as possible to see just what had happened. The sight of the mangled bodies and the moans of the wounded and dying were heartrending.

"Several men from the local train soon joined me and we set to work at once dragging the injured ones from under the debris. R. O'Connor of Bound Brook and Dr. Flynn of Somerville, both of whom I had known before, soon drove to the scene and worked with me all afternoon."

Miss Annie A. Johns of Shamokin, Penn., who was brought from the scene of the wreck to St. Vincent's Hospital, this city, was at first thought to have been internally injured. It was said at the hospital last evening that she was then believed to be suffering only from some serious bruises and shock, and would doubtless recover. She was in no condition, however, to make a statement or see visitors.