

GRAHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



HONORING THOSE WHO PIONEERED THE RUGGED MOUNTAINS OF GRAHAM COUNTY



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NEWSLETTER

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Next Meeting:

January 8, 2018

Mondays @ 4:30 p.m.
Register of Deeds Office
12 N. Main Street
Robbinsville, NC 28771

The Daily Reporter – Dover,
Ohio - Wednesday, July 24,
1968

""Brakes Gave Way, Jump, Jump!"

TOPTON – (UPI) A 1925 Shay locomotive steam engine, carrying four freight cars and a caboose filled with 13 tourists, rolled out of control down a mountain incline Tuesday and overturned two miles west of here

"The conductor came running through shouting 'The brakes gave way, jump, jump,'" said Ralph Payne of Cincinnati, Ohio, a passenger in the caboose.

"I looked out and we must have been doing 50-60 miles an hour, I'm not about to throw a 4-year-old off under those conditions," Payne said.

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Shay Train Wreck (Cont'd)

Payne, his son Jonathan 4, and his 80-year-old father-in-law, Thomas Carum, also of Cincinnati, stayed in the caboose, which slammed against a tree.

They were not injured. Carum held onto the boy.



The freight cars, loaded with lumber, rambled down Nantahala Mountain.

Four members of the Larry Sabastinos family, of Blacksburg, Va., were hospitalized in Andrews with injuries suffered when they jumped from the train.

Jacqueline Sabastinos, 13, suffered a broken leg.

Kenneth Glenn of Mount Holly said there was a "lot of confusion" when the train picked up speed.

"I had my wife jump first, and my boy next, and then I jumped," Glenn said. "I went up the track to see my wife and she was in a lot of pain. Her back was hurt."

Mrs. Glenn was also hospitalized.

One person was originally reported missing, but authorities said everyone was accounted for.

The locomotive, which was valued at \$35,000, fell on its side.

Engineer Virgis Carpenter and conductor J.B. Waldroup said it would never run again. They said the brakes gave way with a "burst of steam."

Ross Smith, vice president and general manager of the Graham County Railroad Co., said it was "too early" to tell if the locomotive could be gotten back into shape.

The engine had been in the shop for repairs and overhaul and had just come out four days earlier.

The train operated daily freight run from Robbinsville to Topton in Graham County, a distance of 15 miles. It was one of the oldest steam locomotive trains making an Interstate Commerce Commission run.

The Graham County Railroad Co. also has two other steam locomotives. It operates two "Bearcreek Junction" tourist trains.

A company spokesman said the tourist rides would not be affected by the accident."

The four-car train of wood and lumber had loaded its passengers at Bear Creek Junction, stopped for a brake test at the gap of the mountain, and then ran away as the train rounded the bend beside the overlook. What happened? A copy of the Interstate Commerce Commission wreck report could not be found and an N.C. Utilities Commission report said only that the ICC failed to learn the cause of the wreck. All of the railroaders who worked the train that day are gone. But a source who viewed the wreck report and discussed it with the FRA motive power and equipment inspector from Atlanta, who was in charge of the area, describe it like this.

The train of two chain flats of lumber and two chipwood cars and caboose pulled into the gap for a brake test. Two of the cars had inoperable air brakes. The engineer did a standard air brake reduction of 20 pounds to set the brakes for the test. The engineer sped through the test, making a release of the brakes as the conductor walked back to the caboose. The engineer whistled off without allowing the air brake system on the train enough time to fully recharge the system – with only 50 percent braking power.

As the train rounded the curve at the overlook, the engineer made a 10-pound set, which should engage the brakes on most trains. He took another 10-pound set, which would stop most trains, but nothing happened, and despite putting the train into emergency braking, it ran away.



[For more information on this fascinating piece of the history of Graham County contact:](#)

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