



Canadian Rail

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The Desjardins Canal Disaster, March 12, 1857

Compiled by Fred Angus



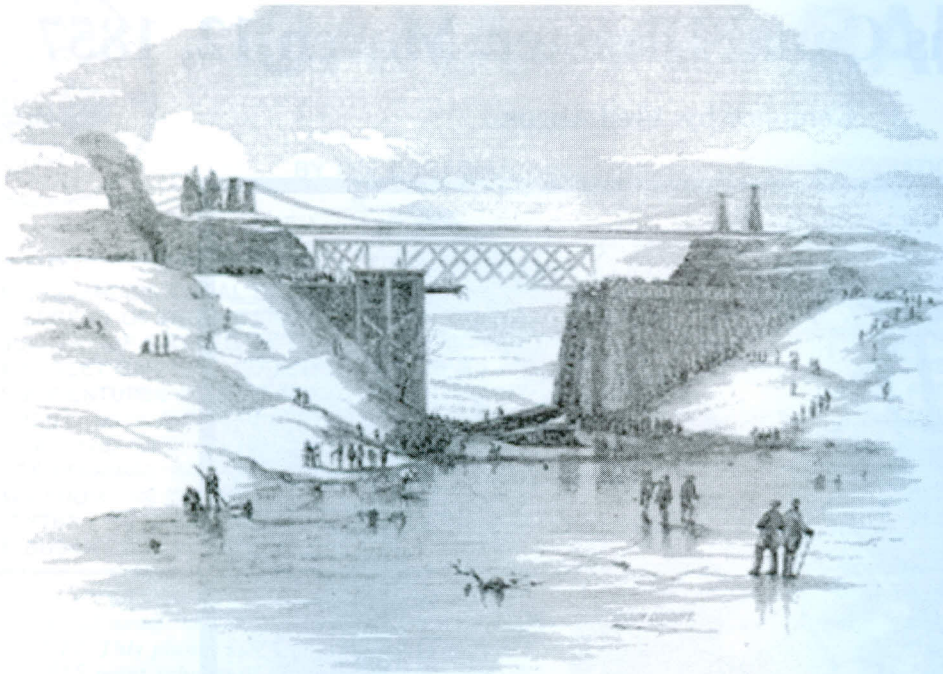
The Toronto railway train breaking through the trestle bridge over the Desjardins Canal, falling sixty feet into the gulf below. From a sketch by Col. Frank Foster, of Philadelphia.

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857.

At 4:10 P.M. on the afternoon of March 12, 1857 the afternoon accommodation train of the Great Western Railway departed from Toronto bound for Hamilton, thirty-eight miles away. This train consisted of a baggage car and two coaches, hauled by 4-4-0 locomotive "Oxford". On board were 95 or 96 passengers, representing a good cross-section of the population of Canada West. Included were Donald Stewart a merchant of Hamilton, John Wilford a miller from England, Rev. A Booker of Hamilton together with several other clergymen returning from a conference at Toronto. Only an hour or two before, Rev. Booker had preached a discourse on the words "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter". Timothy Doyle a shoemaker and his brother Patrick a labourer were aboard, as were several women and children, including some entire families

returning home from the big city. However the most prominent of the passengers was Samuel Zimmerman of Niagara Falls, contractor, entrepreneur and banker, often called the "Railway King". In fact he had been in Toronto on business and in his pocket carried the charter for the proposed Canada Southern Railway. Mr. Zimmerman was not the only rich person aboard, for J. Russel, a contractor of Brantford, had several thousand dollars in cash on his person.

The train was scheduled to reach Hamilton about 5:45 P.M., and as that time approached the passengers looked forward eagerly to arrival home again. Sometime on the trip it is believed that Mr. Zimmerman wound his big gold watch (for it was still running 23 hours later) and watched the lights of Hamilton appear in the distance. Before reaching Hamilton, the track rounded the extreme western end of Lake



Ontario and crossed the truss bridge over the Desjardins Canal. Just as the "Oxford" approached the bridge, there was a sudden jolt - a hidden crack had caused an axle on the leading truck to break, derailing the locomotive. The damaged and derailed engine continued on to the bridge where the wheel flanges cut into the stringers under the track. The result was that the locomotive fell through the bottom of the bridge, and one by one, the three cars of the train followed; a fall of sixty feet into the ice-covered canal. About sixty people died including Mr. Zimmerman. It was the worst train wreck in Canadian history up till that time; in fact, in the 145 years since, only one wreck (the one at Beloeil in 1864) has surpassed it in number of fatalities.

Much has been written about the Desjardins Canal disaster, more than the Beloeil wreck which claimed more lives. It is easy to see why. At Hamilton in 1857 the victims were well known members of the community, whereas the Beloeil victims were immigrants that had just arrived from Europe. The aftermath of the disaster is even credited with being one of the many causes of the panic of 1857 which caused such financial hardship in North America later that year.

In many of the numerous accounts of this wreck, it is mentioned that photographs were taken, both of the wrecked train and of some of the victims. Certainly some of the published drawings are said to be based on photographs. However, until recently no such photos were known to have survived. In 2001 Doug Smith discovered, in the National Archives in Ottawa, a photo showing the wrecked bridge and the remains of one of the passenger cars. To the best of our knowledge this photo, one of the oldest Canadian railway photographs, has never been published before, and represents an important historical find.

In addition to this photo we include a contemporary account, in typical Victorian journalistic style, of the disaster. This account is taken from four different publications and

combined together. These are: The *Hamilton Spectator*, the *Toronto Globe*, the *Montreal Gazette* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. The latter paper, a U.S. publication, deserves a special note. Little more than a year old (its first issue was in December 1855), Frank Leslie's produced illustrated articles in the manner of the *Illustrated London News* in England. Its issue for April 4 1857 contained extensive coverage of the Hamilton disaster, as well as twelve woodcut engravings, at least one of which is based on a photograph, the original of which is presently unknown. These engravings are also reproduced here, as are some notices and items from other contemporary newspapers. Some of the accounts were submitted by Ken Heard, others from the National Library of Canada

and the Ontario Provincial Archives. The Frank Leslie's paper was from the Hamilton Public Library.

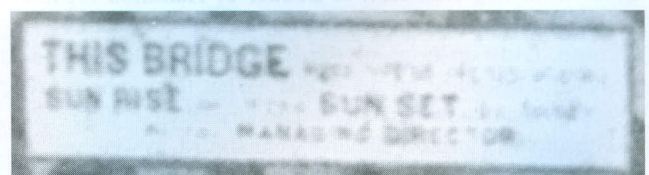
The disaster at the Desjardins Canal was a milestone in Canadian Railway history. It marked the beginning of the end of the "laissez faire" period of railway construction and operation. One of the first results was the "Accidents on Railways Act", passed on May 28 1857, only two and a half months later. This mandated better safety inspection and full reports to the government of structures and equipment on Canadian Railways. The first such report was the well known "Keefer Report" which appeared early in 1859. Although many more terrible accidents occurred in the years ahead, the aftermath of Desjardins Canal was an early step in a process that has made the railways of Canada among the safest in the world.

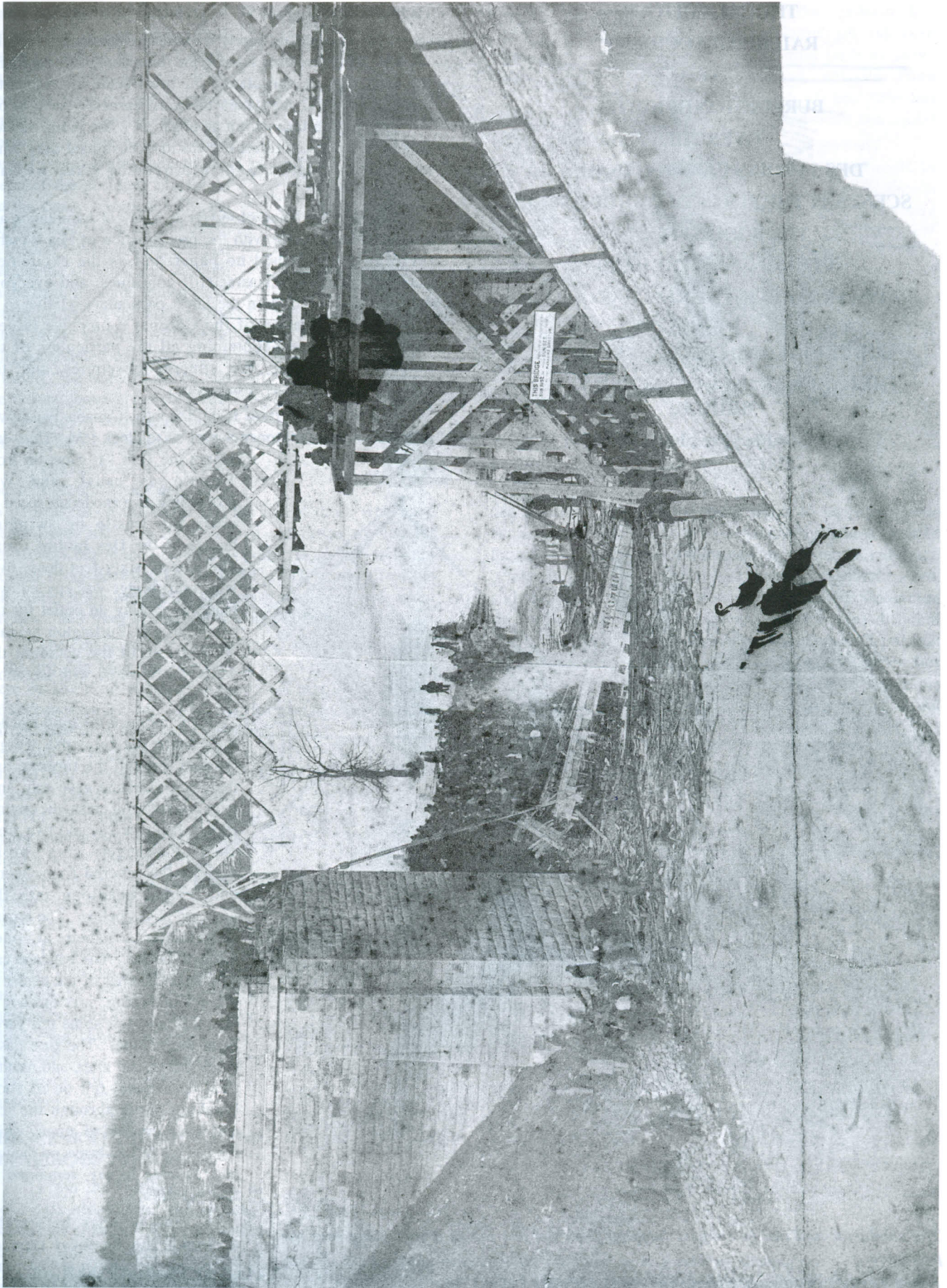
ABOVE: View of the accident taken N.W. from Hamilton Bay, Suspension bridge in the background. From a photograph by D.C. Beere, Esq.

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857.

OPPOSITE: A true historical find. An actual photograph of the wreck, taken from the bay side of the bridge. Note the smashed coach in the canal, as well as the damaged structure of the bridge. The sign on the bridge (enlargement below) refers to "This Bridge", "Sun Rise", "Sun Set" and "Managing Director", but the remainder of the inscription is not legible in the photo.

National Archives of Canada, photo No. PA135158.





**THE CALAMITOUS
RAILROAD ACCIDENT
AT
BURLINGTON HEIGHTS!
OVER THE
DES JARDINS CANAL, CANADA.
SCENES AT THE PLACE OF THE DISASTER!
THE BODIES FOUND!
RECOGNIZING THE DEAD!
APPEARANCE OF THE REMAINS OF THE
BRIDGE AND CARS.
THE BRIDGE AND ITS CONSTRUCTION.
THE LAST MELANCHOLY SCENE AT THE
BRIDGE.
Etc., Etc., Etc.**

Hamilton, March 17, 1857.

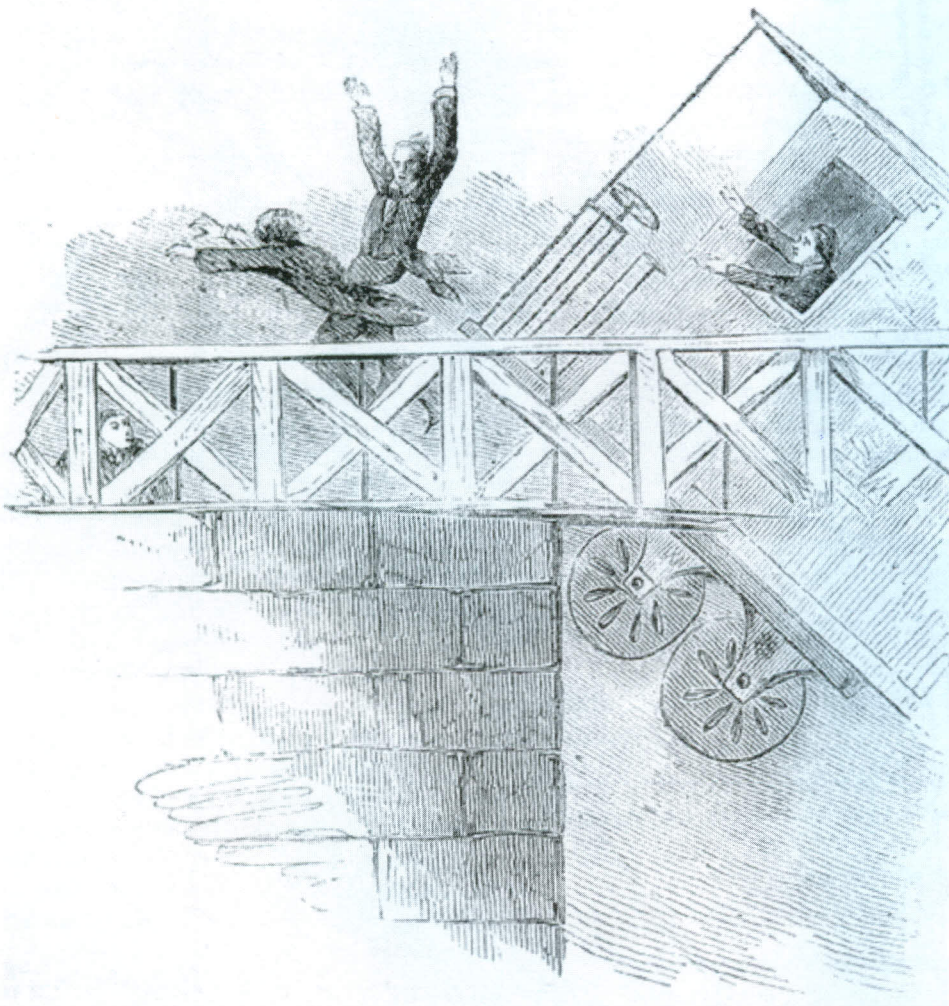
It may be said surely a national calamity has befallen us. Men who have ever stood in the foremost ranks - capitalists the most shrewd, speculators the most keen, merchants the most far-sighted, clergymen the most earnest - have at one fell swoop been taken from amongst us. The brain wanders and the pen almost refuses to do its accustomed duty when attempting to describe the heartrending scene we have witnessed.

Yesterday being observed as a day of humiliation and prayer, in accordance with the proclamation of His Worship the Mayor, we issued no paper; but as the excitement occasioned by the disaster still continues, and everyone appears anxious to learn the latest particulars relative to it, and the Investigation of the Coroner's jury, we issue a supplemental sheet, containing all the particulars of the accident, including the funeral obsequies and the Investigation so far as it has gone.

The railway train from Toronto (Canada West) was due at Hamilton at a quarter past six o'clock P.M., Thursday, March the 12th. It came on from Toronto as usual, and was proceeding at a moderate speed to cross the trestle or swinging bridge of the Des Jardins canal. The chasm, sixty feet deep, over which this bridge was erected, was made by cutting an outlet for the canal through Burlington heights. At the time of the accident the water was covered with ice about two feet thick.

The moment the train reached the bridge the immense weight crushed through the timbers, and the whole structure gave way, and, with one frightful crash, the engine, tender, baggage car and two first-class passenger cars broke through the severed frame-work, and leaped headlong into the yawning abyss below. The engine and tender crushed at once through the ice. The baggage car, striking the corner of the tender in the act of falling, was thrown to one side and fell some ten yards from the engine. The first passenger car rushed after, and turning as it descended, felt on its roof, breaking partly through the ice, and being crushed to atoms, while the last car fell endways on the ice, and, strange to say, remained in that position.

Five minutes before the accident, the heaviest type of freight engine known at that time, passed over the bridge in safety.



The conductor and two passengers jumping from the last car as it was going over the precipice.

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857.

Many persons were standing at the station, a mile and a half distant, watching for the Toronto train to come in, and saw it all disappear. This caused a speedy action to find out the cause. Mr. Hardman, of the heavy freight engine, went right back to the scene of the accident and found out the cause. Undoubtedly, the engine must have been broken, as the left wheel left the rail and marked the sleepers, and so forth, on the track for some fifteen yards before it reached the bridge. The cause of the accident will not be fully ascertained until the engine is raised. We learn, however, that the reason above given (breaking of the axle) is correct, as far as can now be ascertained.

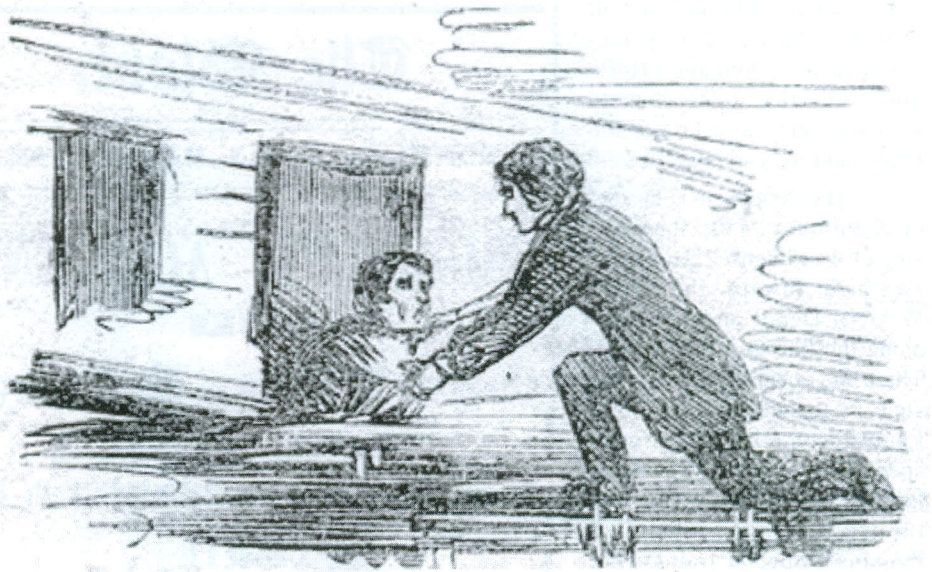
The loss of life was of course frightful. There were 95 or 96 passengers on the train, and the list of those who have escaped only numbers about twenty. As far as we can yet learn, every one in the first car was killed; those who were not crushed being drowned by the water which nearly filled the car. About thirty were in the last car, of whom ten were taken out dead, and most of the others were fearfully mutilated.

The conductor, Mr. Barrett; the deputy superintendent of the line, Mr. Muir, and Mr. Jessop, one of the auditors, who were on the hind platform, jumped off and escaped. The express messenger, Mr. —, Mr. Richardson, a conductor on the road, and the mail conductor were with the baggagemen. The latter jumped over the baggage he had piled up ready for delivery, and escaped with but slight injury, while the three others went down, but miraculously enough were not much hurt. The engineer and fireman went under the ice with the locomotive, and their bodies have not yet been recovered.

The mails, of course, have been delayed. Half the bridge is destroyed, and freight traffic must suffer interruption until it is restored, before which, we should imagine, some weeks will elapse. Arrangements have been made for the interchange of passengers.

THE SCENE AT THE BRIDGE AND CLEARING OF THE WRECK.

From the splintered ruins of those cars arose cries and shrieks, groans and oburgations of unearthly intensity; while through their ruptured sides and floors protruded the limbs



*The German rescuing his friend from the car window.
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857.*

and bodies of scores of the dead, wounded and dying, who but a moment before were in the heyday of happiness. Palsied for a few moments, the bewildered survivors could only gaze helplessly upon the horrors before them. A reaction ensued, and then each flew to the rescue, impelled by a common instinct. Immediate assistance was had from the different shops, and persons engaged on the works at the depot. All night persevering efforts were made to extricate the bodies from the wreck. Rafts were formed on the ice, to enable the men with long poles and hooks to proceed with their mournful



*The rescue of the little girl from a cake of floating ice.
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857.*

task in safety. All night and all next day the wreckers persevered in their humane efforts until all the bodies were removed, and the debris of the bridge and the cars was cleared.

The excitement in the city of Hamilton directly the news spread was intense. Hundreds swarmed toward the Great Western Depot and streamed along the line to the fatal spot. There the scene presented was such as to baffle description. Large locomotive lamps were speedily brought. Fires were kindled and a lurid glare was thrown over the shattered remains. Special trains were dispatched to the bridge to bring home the wounded. It was no easy task to descend the steep slope to the canal. Ropes were lowered and ladders attached to them, on which the dead and wounded from the car which stood endways were first drawn up. Then the bottom of the car, which had partly sunk through the ice was hewn away with axes, and the unfortunate passengers, some sadly mutilated and even cut in pieces, and all saturated with water, were taken out. Many worked with energy and vigor; but who was that noble fellow that every one must have seen, stripped to his shirtsleeves, standing up to his middle in the freezing water, who, himself a host, did more than all the rest? We watched him long from the height above as he hewed away the fragments and extricated the bodies. If ever man deserved a reward, it is he.

As soon as the dead were drawn up the slope they were either put in the cars for conveyance to Hamilton, or were laid in a small house near the bridge. There were no less than thirteen ministers on that train, who had been attending a convention in Toronto. It is said that one family were in the cars consisting of a father, mother and four children. Only one of the children escaped. One of the little victims, a girl, about four years of age, was brought into the house alluded to when we were there. The poor little creature was smiling prettily as if she had been sleeping and dreaming of sweet things when the accident occurred, and had been launched into the long steep of death before the dream had vanished from her mind.

Among the dead was Samuel Zimmerman to whom railways have at length proved fatal; and near him two children, aged one and three respectively, and her who seemed to be their mother. Notwithstanding that Mr. Zimmerman was under the water 23 hours, his faithful watch was still going.

The Globe.

TORONTO, SATURDAY, MARCH 14. 1857.

FRIGHTFUL ACCIDENT ON THE Great Western Railway!

A Whole Train Precipitated into the
Canal!!

OVER SEVENTY PERSONS KILLED!

A national calamity may fairly be said to have befallen us. Men who have stood in the foremost rank have been taken from amongst us. The brain wanders, and the pen almost refuses to do its accustomed duty, when attempting to describe the heart-rending scene we have witnessed.

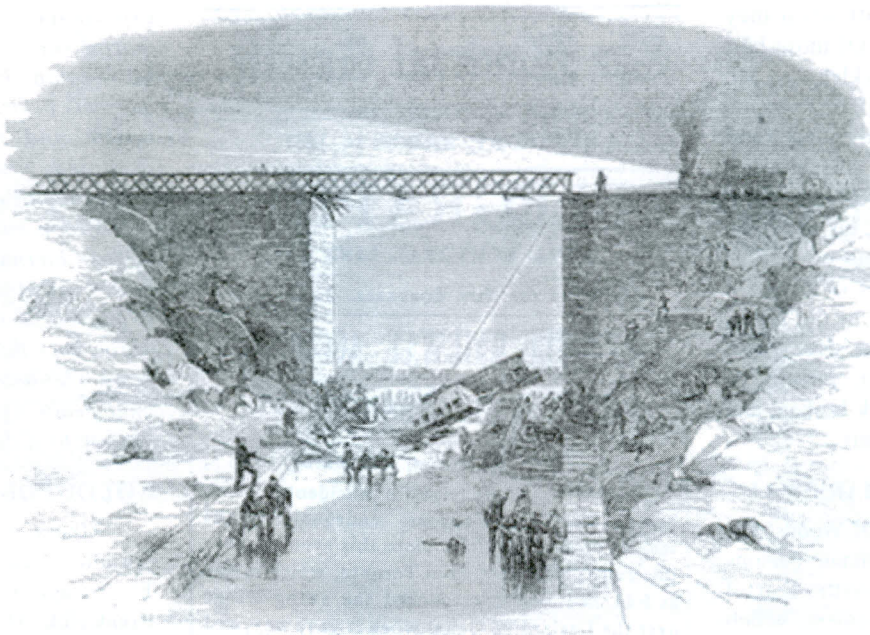
How Toronto received the news.

At the railway depot, when the sufferers were brought in, crowds assembled anxious to hear who was dead, and to know if any of their friends were there. The corpses were taken into one of the large baggage-rooms, where Coroners Bull and Roseburgh proceeded to have them examined, and, when possible, identified. In an out building, adjoining the Station House, at Hamilton, were sixty corpses laid out on the floor, including men, women and children.

As soon as the intelligence of the catastrophe reached the city, Major Boker and Captain Macdonald's Companies of Volunteers marched to the scene, and every credit is due to them for their conduct. The pressure of the crowd had all but forced in the strong doors of the depot when the Artillery Company arrived. They formed a cordon around the room, which was respected. The rifles marched on to the bridge.

WHO ESCAPED, AND HOW.

Every person in the first passenger car, except Owen Doyle, James Barton, of Stratford, and two children between eight and nine years of age, perished. The escape of these seems perfectly miraculous. One of the children was thrown out of a window on to the ice, it knows not how. The other was dragged out of a window, having been up to its neck in water for some fifteen minutes in almost a senseless state. They were a little boy and a little girl, brother and sister. They can recollect nothing after the fearful crash, and being thrown upon their heads. Their mother, father and uncle perished, and Owen Doyle, who saved himself, is their uncle. He saved himself by forcing his way out of a window as the water was rushing in. He remembers swimming on to the ice; and then lost consciousness. James Barton cannot tell how he got out of the window. He recollects but a wild scream - being dashed against the ceiling of the car. Half senseless and half drowned, he made a last spring for a window. He was picked off of a cake of ice a few minutes afterwards, senseless. The two children, marvellous to say, are but slightly injured; and Doyle and Barton are but comparatively little hurt. Doyle had his brother, and sister-in-law, two cousins, and a cousin's wife, and two nieces, all killed or drowned. And what with his own injuries, the fearful excitement of the scene he had passed through, and the loss of so many near and dear to him, the poor fellow wandered about almost bereft of his memory and his senses. Barton's father was also lost; they were sitting



The conductors of the railway raising the ruins of the cars. From a sketch by Mr. Lum. Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857.



The people living in the vicinity of the broken bridge hunting among the ruins for the dead and wounded. Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857.

together when the car was turned upside down, and they were dashed against the top of it.

The escape of Richardson, Mr. Urquhart of the express, the mail conductor, and the baggage master, was equally marvellous. When the locomotive and tender went into the abyss literally, the baggage car swung round apparently as it was going over, and broke loose from the tender. The consequence was, it struck on the ice to the left of where the locomotive disappeared; and slid, so strong was the ice, a

short distance. It never overturned; and its three inmates, though thrown among trunks and all sorts of things, strange and happy to say, escaped with but barely trifling bruises. The conductor, hearing the smash of the bridge, and standing at the open door of the car, leaped out just at the brink of the abyss. He escaped unhurt.

In the second car, the persons saved were the Conductor, Mr. Barrett, the Deputy Superintendent, Mr. Muir, and Mr. Jessop, an auditor. They were on the platform of the

last car, and jumped off when they heard the concussion. Of those hurt in this car, were Dr. Macklem and Mr. T.C. Street, of the Falls. The former is very much injured in the head, and had a contusion in the side but it is hoped not seriously. Mr. Street's collar-bone was broken, his arm very badly hurt, and he was otherwise much bruised. Mr. Curtis, of Ingersoll, was dreadfully injured in the spine, and was expected to die every moment. Mr. Barton, junior, of Woodstock, had his back broken, and is otherwise fearfully hurt.

STATEMENT OF MR. MARSHALL.

W.R. Marshall, of Woodstock, was one of the few fortunate persons who were not killed by the fearful accident. From his statement, which appears in the *Spectator*, we make the following extract:

"There were no incidents of a striking nature on the trip from Toronto to the junction with the main line near Hamilton. When within sight of the Hamilton station, Mr. Beatty asked me 'what time it was'. I looked at my watch and told him it was a quarter to six. About this time the train began to go slower. Nearly half a minute afterwards I perceived quite a consternation in the cars, passengers running to and fro, apparently much excited. At the same time, I felt a strange sensation, as if caused by something impeding the motion of the train. It was not a shock, but at the same time everyone seemed to think that something was wrong. As I was not aware of the dangerous character of the place we were approaching, I retained my seat, and advised others to do the same. A slight pause ensued, myself and those sitting with me remaining still, but anxiously waiting the result, when with one jerk we were precipitated into the yawning abyss below. While descending I retained perfect consciousness, and felt we were going down some awful precipice; not a voice was heard in the descent. On reaching the bottom there was one general crash, after which I found myself in total darkness, hemmed in on every side; and crushed almost to suffocation by human bodies and broken seats. The blood oozed from my mouth, and it seemed as if every breath I drew would be the last. The next few minutes were the most awful I ever witnessed: oh, that it may never be my lot to

The Montreal Gazette.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14. 1857.

TELEGRAPHIC.

VIA MONTREAL LINE.

[Reported for THE MONTREAL GAZETTE.]

DREADFUL RAILWAY ACCIDENT.

FRIGHTFUL LOSS OF LIFE.

HAMILTON, 12th March, 1857.

Another of those frightful accidents which human forethought appears inadequate to the task of preventing, took place this evening near this city. The train from Toronto, which is due at 5:45, had scarcely touched the swing-bridge over the Desjardins Canal, when it gave way, and the whole train was precipitated into the water, falling a distance of 40 feet. The engine, tender and baggage car were all completely buried in the water. The forward passenger car, in descending, was turned upside down, leaving a portion of it only above the water. The forward end of the last passenger car rested upon either the engine or baggage car, and falling back upon the wall supporting the bridge, remained in nearly an upright position. Immediate assistance was had from the different shops and persons engaged on the works. All that were in the last car were taken out mostly wounded, and, we are sorry to say, too many dead. A hole was cut in the bottom of the car which lay across the canal, and the bodies taken from it as soon as possible; but this could not be otherwise than a slow operation, when it is considered how cold the water is at this season of the year, and that the depth was sufficient to hide an engine, tender and baggage car.

Mr. Muir, the Traffic Superintendent, was on board, but fortunately jumped off as the cars took the leap. Mr. Barrett, Conductor, escaped unhurt, as did also the Express Messenger, Post-Office Clerk and Baggage Conductor.

Among the killed is Mrs. P. S. Stevenson, of Hamilton. Seventeen bodies were taken to the baggage room, with the exception of two, who were recognised.

Montreal received the news by telegraph late on the night of March 12.

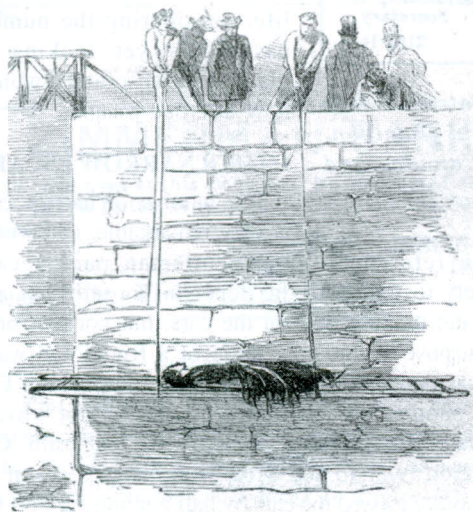
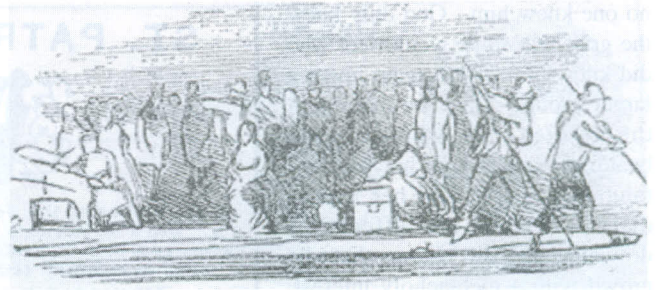
experience the like again. In this fearful situation were placed 80 or 90 human beings, who, a few moments before, rejoiced in excellent health and spirits, their minds occupied with worldly cares or pleasure; little thinking they would be so soon called into the presence of their Eternal Judge. Some prayed, others called upon the saints, others swore fearful oaths. What an awful lesson does this shocking event teach those who habitually put off making their peace with God to some future day, or to a death-bed?"

GOT OUT OF THE WINDOW

Henry August, passenger from Toronto, escaped from the first car. The escape of this person was most wonderful. He is a German; and he and the last named passenger were sitting together on the rear of the first passenger car. The moment they heard the first concussion, they got up and rushed together to the door, the latter only reached the platform. He jumped off just three feet from the chasm. The other car rushed by him and was gone. He stood for a moment paralysed. He then ran down the hill, and was the means of saving from drowning his companion who was not in time to reach the platform. He dragged him out of a window, and comparatively unhurt.

A woman, who lives near the scene of the disaster, and who was the first to witness it, gives some interesting particulars about the two children - the Doyles - who so miraculously escaped. She rushed down the hill to the cars; indeed the poor woman literally rolled down, for it was so steep and slippery she could not keep her feet; and the first object that met her attention was the poor little girl, about eight years of age, on a cake of ice. The little thing said, "Oh, don't mind me, save my brother", and the poor little fellow was at the moment with his chin barely above the water, at the top of one of the

windows, imploring some one to drag him out. The woman, though the ice was broken for some distance round the car, managed to reach him; and after rescuing him, rushed up the hill with one child in her arms, and got a passenger, who was himself badly wounded, to carry the girl on his back. She put them to bed; and strange to say, they got up with scarcely a mark. Owen Doyle, the uncle of the little girl, saved her by



Five more illustrations from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4 1857. LEFT TOP: Grappling in the canal for the dead. LEFT BOTTOM: Hoisting dead bodies by the aid of ladders upon the top of the abutment. RIGHT TOP: Passengers crossing the canal on the rafts. RIGHT MIDDLE: Relations and friends searching among the dead bodies laid out in the large room adjoining the station house. RIGHT BOTTOM: The Doyle children carried up the hill by their preserver and a passenger.

clasping her to his breast when he felt the car overturning, and throwing her out of the window after the crash. The little boy felt some one take him in his arms and fall under him, but he knew not whom. It is difficult to conceive a more melancholy spectacle, than these two children looking on the mangled remains of their mother, father, and nearly all who were dear to them.

RECOGNIZING THE DEAD.

Among the most harrowing scenes attending this fearful catastrophe, are the witnessing the unhappy relatives recognizing the mangled remains of husbands, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. Yesterday morning the wife of Mr. Morley arrived from St. Catharine's, to pick out of the many dead his body. The scene was heartrending as she passed from one dead body to another, all marking death with greater horrors by being more or less mangled. At last

one, even more distorted and mangled than the rest, was come to; and a wild scream but too well told her tale of woe. And in a large storehouse, strewn with dead bodies, and with others going the rounds to make similar heart-rending discoveries, was she left to kneel down and bewail her bereavement. Whilst on one side of the large building a row of bodies were placed, as yet unrecognized, and questions were asked of every new comer, if he or she knew anything of them, a sob or a moan would be heard in another part, indicating that some one had come from a distance and found all her sad expectations realized. Nor was the circumstance less harrowing, of passing the stranger by, who, far from his home, and far from those who were dreaming of his return, there lay, a mangled, unrecognized, unwept victim of a railroad disaster. Here was evidently a poor Irish laborer; his pipe was still in his hand; and a smile played over his kindly countenance. One passed, yet another, and still another, and

no one knew him. God only knew the grief that some would feel who did know him. Here again linger a larger group. They are looking at the figure of a woman, once beautiful, and though her hair lies tangled and wet, and her face is distorted from the effects of drowning, she still charms that idle crowd with a melancholy interest. She has a marriage ring on her finger. Two locketts are on her breast; and a brooch is suspended by a yellow ribbon round her neck. For whom did she wear them? Who were dear to her? To whom was she dear? No one knew her. God help her! she alone then required to be but recognized by him! And so passed the scene. Here a moan and a tear marked the recognition of the mangled remains of a friend or a relation. There strangers, with heavy hearts, gazed on those who were unwept; and though of themselves, if ever such a lot should be theirs. There may be scenes of sorrow and of horror, but who can conceive aught so utterly heartrending, as when people go away in peace and happiness, to return this evening, or to-morrow, and are first heard of as mangled by drowned by such disaster.

THE EXAMINATION OF THE PAPERS AND LETTERS OF THE DECEASED.

This was little less melancholy than the recognizing their dead bodies. In the pocket of one would be found letters from his wife and children, wishing him home, and sorrowing for his absence. Another died with daguerreotypes on his breast of those he loved most on earth. A mother's letter was found in this one's pocket, asking relief, and saying she was ill. The money for relief was found side by side with the letter. Another's name was learned by the letters of those who loved him. And yet another was hurrying home to console the sick or the dying. Such were some of the incidents.

THE REMAINS OF THE BRIDGE AND THE CARS.

A vast concourse of people gathered round the scene of the disaster yesterday. All day men were engaged breaking into pieces the first passenger car, which had been nearly submerged. It was found impossible to raise it bodily. The locomotive and tender are still under water. The second passenger car was broken up, and carried away the first evening of the disaster. The bridge has been allowed to remain precisely as it was broken; and will, we apprehend, be allowed to continue so until after the inquest, and after thorough inspection by competent engineers. It was a matter of utter astonishment to every one, how any person could have escaped, after such a fearful fall. The walls on either sides are of very solid masonry; the adjacent banks are

ST. PATRICK'S DAY.



A Meeting of the Joint Committee of the Young Men's St. Patrick's Association, and the Catholic Temperance Society, held in the Reading Room of the Association on Saturday 14th inst.

John O'DONOHUE Esq., moved, seconded by JOHN SHEA Esq., and

Resolved, that on the part of these Societies, they desire to express their deep sorrow at the lamentable accident which took place on the Great Western Railroad on the 12th inst., and to convey to the sufferers and friends of the deceased, their sincere sympathy.

Moved by Mr. E. O'KEEFE, and seconded by Mr. J. MURPHY, and

Resolved, that in view of the sad occurrence, the Societies march in SILENCE, with muffled drums, and craped banners, during the procession, on St. PATRICK'S day, the 17th inst.

CHARLES A. MULDOON,
Secretary.

Toronto, March 17, 1857.

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As a result of the disaster, St. Patrick's Day celebrations were greatly curtailed in Hamilton, Toronto and other cities in Canada and neighbouring states.

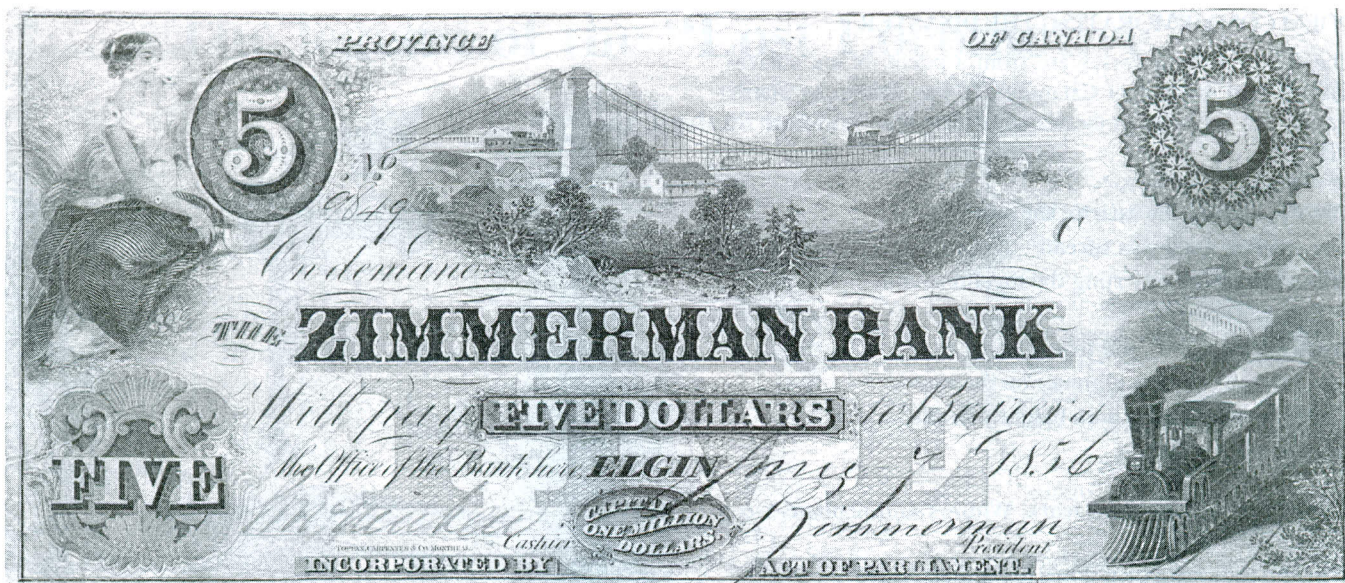
perhaps a hundred feet higher than the railroad. The suspension bridge is thrown over immediately on the right, and is still higher. Then, about sixty feet below the railroad is a narrow deep channel, which looks like a sort of chasm between two high hills. Into this abyss was hurled the ill-fated train. It was just wide enough to let the cars down without touching anything to break their fall. They literally leaped sixty feet into ice and water, one passenger car following the locomotive and completely overturning, and becoming almost submerged; and the other lighting endways upon this. Great as has been the loss of life, considering the number of passengers; yet, looking at the place, it is absolutely wonderful how any one escaped.

OTHER NARROW ESCAPES

The number of narrow escapes is very remarkable, and worthy of a passing reference. One gentleman paid a cabman handsomely to gallop to the depot in Toronto, but arrived just too late; another was on the cars, but got off for some trifling purpose at the suggestion of a friend and was left; another was detained by an invitation to dine with a Cabinet Minister; another procrastinated, he knows not why, till it was too late; though he desired to take that train. Others, again, stayed over to see Miss Nickinson perform at the theatre; another missed the cars by half a minute at Port Credit; another, the same at Waterdown; another got off and was left behind at Wellington Square. A lady who was killed was taken on in the morning on her way down, after the train had started. Such are the trifling circumstances by which life's tenor is held, or forever snapped asunder.

HOW THE ACCIDENT WAS FIRST DISCOVERED.

There is but one small house, belonging to the poor woman who behaved so nobly by the Doyle children near the fallen bridge; and she was looking out of the window as the train approached. She says the catastrophe made little noise. The train seemed to sway to one side, and then all disappeared. Probably the swaying was the first passenger car overturning. She says she saw a man leap from the locomotive immediately before it disappeared. This was likely the engineer, as he was found with his neck broken on the ice. At the same time one of the workmen at the station house - it is about a mile distant from the broken bridge - who was watching the train coming in saw the steam suddenly stop, and a sort of dust arise. In a second there was no train to be seen. The alarm was at once given; and we believe that all persons connected with the railroad have exerted themselves most assiduously since, to render all the assistance they could. The crash was not heard at the depot.



ZIMMERMAN BANK.

THE business of this Bank will be conducted as usual, and its Notes redeemed in Gold at the Counter as heretofore.

J. W. DUNKLEE,
Cashier.

Clifton, C. W., March 17, 1857.

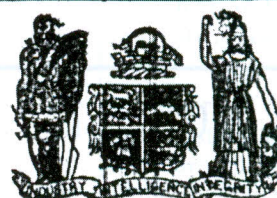
2164-1m

TOP: The death of Samuel Zimmerman caused great consternation in the corporate and financial circles in Canada. Besides his railway connections, he was also the founder of the Zimmerman Bank in Elgin, later Clifton, near Niagara Falls. It was here that he owned the Clifton House, a large hotel. It is said that a company, in which Zimmerman had an interest, built the bridge over the Desjardins Canal and skimped on the construction. If this is true, it is a great irony that Zimmerman was one of the victims when the train fell through the same bridge. The five dollar banknote shown above was issued in 1856, less than a year before the disaster. Ironically it depicts a bridge! Some notes of this bank also showed the Clifton House.

ABOVE: Soon after the disaster the Zimmerman Bank published a reassuring advertisement indicating that business would go on as usual and the notes would still be redeemable in gold. All was not well, however. The Zimmerman heirs sold the bank, which had never been overly sound anyway. It was renamed the Bank of Clifton and became a very shady operation. Soon it failed, with total loss of funds to all depositors and noteholders.

RIGHT: The funeral of Samuel Zimmerman was a very elaborate affair, held with full Masonic ritual. The announcement was published in numerous newspapers, this one immediately followed the official notice of mourning by the City Council of Toronto.

New Advertisements.

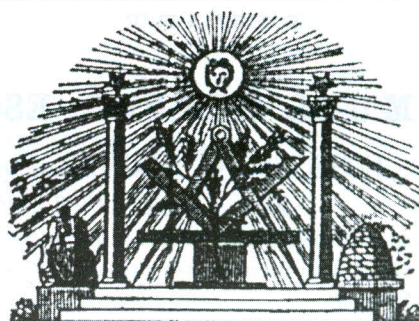


THE Members of the Common Council of the City of Toronto, deeply sympathizing with the relatives and friends of the sufferers by the late disastrous Railway accident near Hamilton, will refrain from meeting for business this evening, in order to afford an opportunity of manifesting a last evidence of respect to the remains of the unfortunate victims.

JOHN HUTCHISON,
Mayor.

Mayor's Office, Toronto, }
March 16, 1857.

2163-1t



Funeral of the Late Mr. S. Zimmerman.

THE Brethren of the Provincial Grand Lodge of A. F. & A. Masons of Canada West, and the Fraternity generally, are respectfully invited to attend the FUNERAL of our deceased Brother, SAMUEL ZIMMERMAN, on Monday next, the 16th inst. The procession will leave Clifton Lodge, Niagara Falls, at 1 P. M. The Brethren to appear in full Masonic clothing.

THOS. G. RIDOUT,
D. P. G. M.

Toronto, March 14, 1857.

2162-2t

POEM COMMEMORATING THE DISASTER

The following two verses are from a poem, of six stanzas, entitled "On the Recent Calamity". It was written by Harriet Annie, and appeared in the *Hamilton Spectator* on March 20, 1857.

The fire was on the hearth, the sun was set,
The evening meal was spread
When round the city rung the direful sound,
"Thy loved are dead."

Tears for the dead - sad tears,
Yet doth the rainbow glimmer on the cloud,
And hues of Paradise doth brightly beam
On pall and shroud.

Tears for the dead - sad tears, Widows and orphans weep
heartbroken now,
Why did the storm beat down upon their heads?
In grief they bow.
Ah! humble be our plea.
His love to ask upon our heart's plowed sod,
Our answer to the mystery must be,
The will of God.'

BOARD OF RAILWAY COMMISSIONERS OF CANADA.

REPORT
OF
SAMUEL KEEFER, ESQ.,
INSPECTOR OF RAILWAYS,
For the Year 1858.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD.



HAMILTON:
PRINTED BY GILLESPIE & ROBERTSON, COURT HOUSE SQUARE.
1859.



ABOVE: The monument in Hamilton Cemetery to the victims of the disaster of 1857. It is surmounted by a model of a 4-4-0 locomotive of the 1850s. This photograph was taken on April 15 1927 by John Boyd (1865-1941).

National Archives of Canada, John Boyd Collection, photo No. PA87661.

LEFT: One of the results of the Desjardins Canal disaster was the passage of the "Accidents on Railways Act". This occurred on May 27 1857, only 76 days after the wreck. As a result of this act, a report was made by Samuel Keefer, inspector of Railways. The first such report covered the year 1858, and was printed in Hamilton in 1859. The Keefer Report is of very great interest to railway historians for it lists practically every locomotive then on the railways of Canada, together with such information as builder, date of construction, basic dimensions and mileage run. Most of this information is not found in any other source.