

# ***THE GREAT HORSESHOE WRECK***

by Ralph Beaumont & James Filby

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The Great Horseshoe Wreck

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Credit Valley Series

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# The



# Sun.

IT SHINES FOR ALL

VOLUME 47.

ORANGEVILLE, ONTARIO, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1907.

No. 39

## EXHIBITION SPECIAL WAS WRECKED AT THE CALEDON HORSESHOE 7 ARE KILLED, 114 INJURED

### LOCOMOTIVE AND FIVE PASSENGER COACHES WERE HURLED INTO A FIELD AND MOST COMPLETELY DEMOLISHED

### WILLING WORKERS HAD AN EXCITING TIME GETTING THE DEAD AND WOUNDED FROM THE SPLINTERED CARS AND DEBRIS

Doctors Were Rushed to the Scene in Special Trains from Orangeville and Other Places---Several of the Injured May Die---Many Narrow Escapes Reported---Train Was Running Too Fast to Make the Curve---A Thorough Inquiry as to the Cause Will be Made

between 50 and 60 miles an hour. The engineer did not slow down for the very sharp curve at the horseshoe when the rapidly moving train came to the first curve. Instead of rounding to, the trucks of the locomotive ran over the rails and continued for about 350 feet, landing in the ditch.

#### CARS PILED UP

The big engine lay on its side stripped of everything, the demolished frame of the tender 20 ft behind it and the tank thrown clean over on its back. The first car was a combination mail-and-smoker and was well filled with men. It followed the engine and was splintered into matchwood, the tank of the engine having telescoped. Two were killed in this car and how anyone escaped is simply miraculous. The second coach be-

**THE WRECK.**  
Train-C. P. R. Exhibition Special.  
From Markdale, Ontario.  
To Toronto.  
Scene of Wreck-Horse Shoe Curve, 3 miles east of Caledon.  
Killed-Six.  
Died-One.  
Ambulance Cases-Fourteen.  
Slightly Injured-Thirty-five.  
Passengers-Estimated 400.  
Cause, Fast running.  
Time train left Orangeville, 9:15.  
Distance from Orangeville to scene of wreck, 10 miles.  
Stops-One.  
Estimated speed at scene of wreck-Sixty miles an hour.

followed the second and passed it, turning once or twice and landed partly on its back in the field beside the second coach, the rear end being completely ground off, the fourth coach following close beside the track

SIX SILENT VICTIMS.



Six bodies of the victims, covered with sheets, are lying with their heads close to the 3rd car, which turned turtle, and the 5th car can be seen at the back of the picture. Three were killed in the 2nd car and one in the 3rd.

the wreck and placed in the various parts of the field. None of them appeared to be very badly mutilated, his leg broken. They were taken to the Western hospital, Toronto. A number of the wounded, including W. J. Robinson of North Bay, formerly of this town, were brought up

THE CALEDON WRECK.

# INTRODUCTION:

On Tuesday, October 5, 1869, Prince Arthur, touring Canada West at the time, was present at the turning of the first sod of the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway at Weston, Ontario.

Thus royally started, the Toronto, Grey and Bruce was constructed as a narrow gauge railway.....three and one half feet between rails as compared with today's 4' 8½". The concept of light narrow gauge railways was unproven in Canada up to this time, with only a one and a half mile colliery railway on Cape Breton Island in use. The New Brunswick Railway had proposed building in narrow gauge in 1865 but as of 1867 had not done so. On May 30, 1867, the supporters of the railway in Orangeville together with its financial promoters in Toronto obtained approval to apply for a Charter. Thus, the wheels of Government were beginning to turn so that assent to an Act of Incorporation was obtained on March 4, 1868 constituting the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway.

The choice of narrow gauge proved ill-advised and standard gauge was adopted with the conversion taking place from 1881 to 1883. On August 1, 1883 the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway Company was leased for 999 years to the Ontario and Quebec Railway Company for an annual rental of \$140,000. This leasing was part of a larger scheme and in 1884, the Ontario and Quebec, the Toronto, Grey and Bruce and the Credit Valley Railway were leased in perpetuity to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

During its building, one of the problems which faced the railway as it proceeded from Toronto to Orangeville

was the climbing of the Niagara Escarpment. Somewhere it had to rise off the floor of the extinct glacial Lake Algonquin to the upper plateaus of Grey and Bruce Counties. Coming northwestward from Bolton toward Orangeville, Edward Wragge, the Chief Engineer, chose the route through the Village of Mono Road and thence on towards Charleston (Caledon).

The route crossed over the Hamilton and Northwestern Railway at Cardwell Junction exactly thirty-four miles from its terminus at Toronto and at an elevation of 725 feet above Lake Ontario. In the next six miles, the railway had to climb 385 feet to scale the Niagara Escarpment. This would be the steepest grade that the railway would encounter and would average out at 1.8 per cent over the next four and one-half miles with one section actually at 2% for a distance of six-tenths of a mile. To accomplish this feat, the railway must make use of a horseshoe curve, that is it must almost swing back on itself so that it will be able to obtain as short a distance yet as gentle a grade as possible. Here, then, was the Great Horseshoe on the Toronto, Grey and Bruce.

The Horseshoe was a curve of 462 foot radius and from Mile 37 to the south of the horseshoe to Mile 38 to the north of the horseshoe, the railway climbed over 85 feet yet it traversed less than a quarter mile in actual straight line distance. Here then was the scene as set in 1869 for the Great Horseshoe Wreck of 1907.

**Ralph Beaumont & James Filby**  
August, 1974

**The Sun**

**September 5, 1907**

## **Exhibition Special was Wrecked at the Caledon Horseshoe, 7 are Killed, 114 Injured.**

An awful railway disaster took place on the Canadian Pacific Railway at the Caledon Horseshoe, 9.5 miles south of Orangeville at 9:35 o'clock Tuesday morning in which 7 persons were killed, 6 outright and 1 died in the Western Hospital, Toronto. And about one hundred were more or less seriously injured. Several more may die as a result of the catastrophe.

### **EXHIBITION SPECIAL**

The well-packed train was a special bound for the Toronto Exhibition. It left Markdale in the morning and was about an hour late when it arrived at Orangeville. The train pulled out of the depot here at 9:15, and was ditched at the Horseshoe at 9:35.

When a Sun reporter arrived at the wreck all the wounded had not been removed from the cars and the wreck presented an awful and horrible sight. How the death toll is not one hundred instead of seven is hard to tell. It is simply miraculous how a single soul escaped from the smoker and how at least half of those in the second and third cars were not crushed to death in an instant. It is exceedingly fortunate that the list of killed is not 15 times larger.

### **AN AWFUL WRECK — Scene of the Wreck**

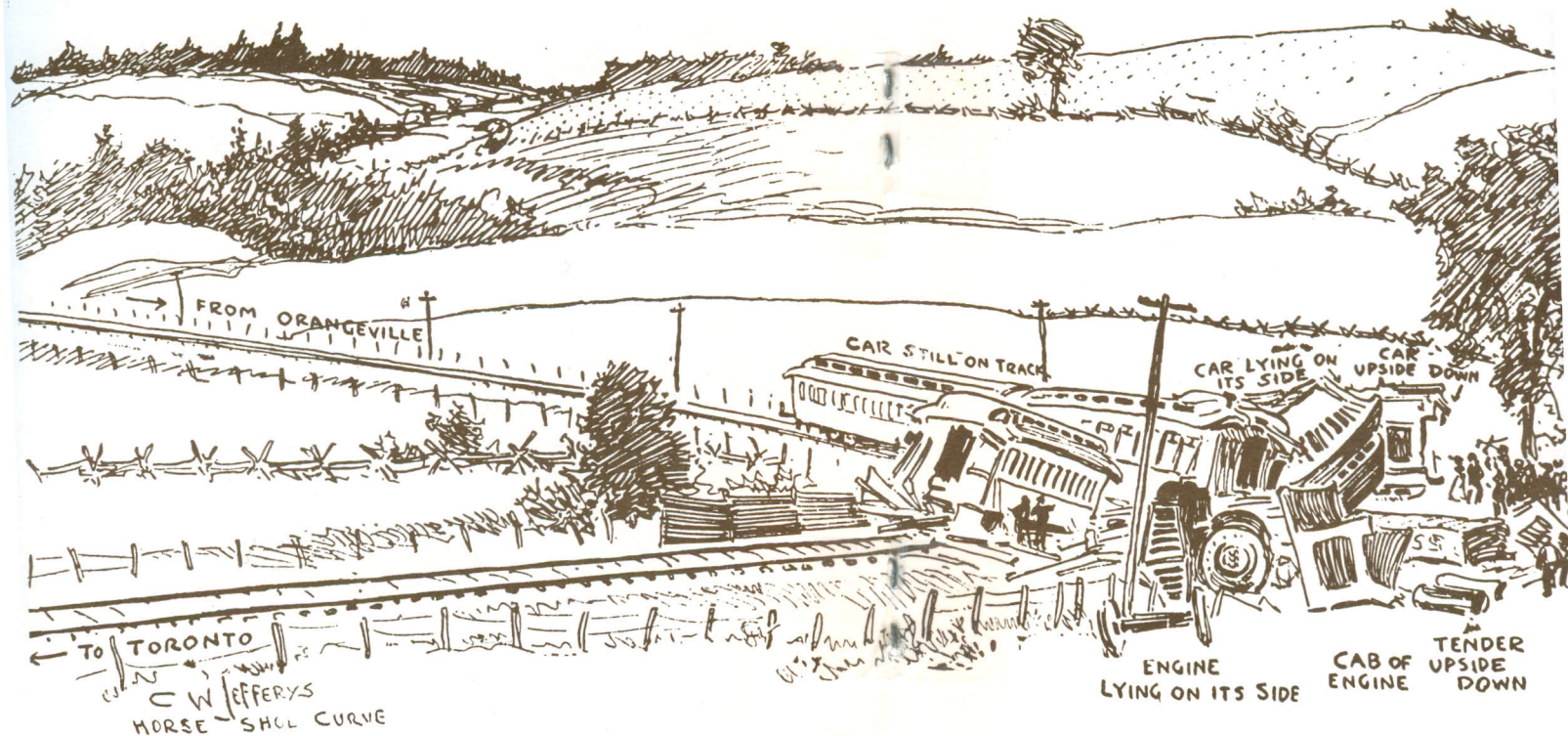
The engine, #555, was in charge of engineer Hodge and fireman James Ross of Toronto Junction and Conductor Matthew Grimes of the same place. The train made a flying trip from Markdale, when Orangeville was reached three more coaches were added, making 7 cars in all. This accounts for the safety of the 150 passengers who got on at this point. When the accident occurred it is estimated that the train was running between 50 and 60 miles an hour. The engineer did not slow down for the very sharp curve at the Horseshoe when the rapidly moving train came to the first curve. Instead of rounding to, the trucks of the locomotive ran over the rails and continued for about 350 feet, landing in the ditch.

## **KILLED**

Norman Tucker — Flesherton  
John Thurston — Walter's Falls  
James Banks — Perm  
James Buller — Priceville  
W.A. Armstrong — Markdale  
Robert Carr — Shelburne  
Richard Bell — Shrigley  
September 12, 1907



# AN ACCURATE SKETCH OF THE WRECK



## THE VERDICT

The following verdict was returned by the jury;  
That Richard Bell came to his death from injuries received in a wreck, which occurred on the third day of September, 1907, on the C.P.R., at a point known as the Horseshoe Curve, in the Township of Caledon, in the County of Peel. The said wreck being caused by the excessive and dangerous rate of speed at which the train on which said Richard Bell was a passenger was being run by the engineer, George Hodge, and the conductor, Matthew Grimes.

And we find that the said wreck was caused by the criminal negligence of the said George Hodge and Matthew Grimes.

And it is our opinion that the C.P.R. is to blame for putting incompetent and inexperienced men in charge of the passenger train running on such a difficult piece of road.



**Sept. 19, 1907**

**Engineer Hodge and Conductor Grimes of Wrecked Train have Been Placed Under Arrest.**

**Coroner's Jury Finds That Horshoe Disaster Was Caused by Their Negligence**

**Railway Blamed For Not Putting a More Careful Engineer in Charge of Train.....**

**Accused Will Apply to be Released on Bail**

The inquest at Toronto into the cause of the death of Richard Bell of Shrigley, one of the victims of the Caledon Horseshoe disaster, was continued on Tuesday night.

## **November 14, 1907**

### **TRAINMEN ON TRIAL**

**Many Witnesses on Hand to Testify About the Horseshoe Wreck**

**“JUMP THE FENCE BOYS”, CRIED FOREMAN SAMUEL MOSSOP TO HIS MEN**

**Inquest Opened at Toronto as to Cause of Horseshoe Disaster....Witnesses All Agree That Train Was Going too Fast - Engineer Tells His Story**

The Caledon inquest into the cause of the Horseshoe disaster has been abandoned and an inquest opened at Toronto before Coroner Johnston. The Crown was represented by W.H. McFadden, K.C. Brampton, while Angus MacMurchy appeared for the C.P.R. and T.C. Robinette, K.C. for Engineer Hodge.

The line of defence (for Hodge and Grimes) is that the ill-fated train was not running at excessive speed, and that the engine, of which Hodge was in charge, was a “roller”, and had been taken off another division as unfit for that roadbed.

In all, about 40 witnesses will be examined at the trial, which will probably conclude Thursday night.

**November 21, 1907**

## **Hodge and Grimes Were Declared Not Guilty Conductor and Engineer Were Not Responsible for the Horseshoe Disaster - Verdict Was Cheered.**

After being out two hours, the jury in the criminal assizes, which closed at Brompton on Saturday night, brought in a verdict of not guilty in the case of Engineer George Hodge, and Conductor Matthew Grimes, charged with criminal negligence, which caused the wreck on the C.P.R. at Caledon Horseshoe Curve where seven lives were lost.

The courtroom was packed, the gallery being filled with women, who sat for over an hour awaiting the result.

At exactly 8:50 the jury came into the room, two hours after Justice Magee had given his charge, explaining the legal points.

There was complete silence, and Clerk Dickson asked the foreman if a verdict had been reached. The foreman rose slowly and in a quiet voice said: "Not Guilty."

There was great applause, despite the protestations of the court officials.

### **SHOULD BE A WARNING**

When order had been restored, Justice Magee said to the prisoners; "I am glad for your sake that this verdict has been reached. I trust it will be a warning to both of you through your whole lives. I release you from attendance at the court."

### **NOT GUILTY**

Conductor Grimes will go back to work. Hodge has not decided yet what he will do. Both were heartily congratulated on the result of the trial. Grimes expected no other verdict. Hodge was glad the strain was over. Five minutes after the jury were locked up a ballot taken stood eight to four for conviction. The four jurymen who were in favour of the accused commenced in earnest to explain and argue every point. It took over an hour, when one by one the others fell into line until the twelve were convinced that the accident was not caused through any negligence of Hodge and Grimes.



## EPILOGUE:

The accounts of the Horseshoe Wreck just given are direct quotes from the Orangeville Sun, a pioneer newspaper of northern Peel County. In doing historical research in this area of Ontario, it is amazing to see the impact the wreck still has on the lives of the older residents. While the Horseshoe Curve disaster does not rank among the massive airline tragedies of to-day, it certainly was the most singularly shocking event in the region. The old residents of Caledon still talk as though it happened only yesterday.

In this booklet, the wreck has been traced from firsthand accounts right through to the inquests and trial of the trainmen. However, aftermaths of the wreck are to be found in the Orangeville paper for more than a year after the event. Lawsuits and claims for personal damages were filed throughout the winter and spring. Finally, in the Nov. 19, 1908 edition of The Sun, a front page heading proclaimed, "Stewart Got Verdict vs. the C.P.R. — Awarded \$11,500 — Last of the Caledon Wreck Cases". Thus, the railway was finally clear of its involvement in the matter.

Compared with other railway disasters, the mere ditching of a train due to fast running is usually not of great consequence. Yet, its occurrence at one of the Credit region's most scenic locations, with the possible exception of the Forks trestle, lends attraction to the wreck. Early copies of the Orangeville Sun are alive with the cornfield meets, rear enders and derailments that occurred in abun-

dance on the lines radiating from Orangeville. But it is the Horseshoe Curve location that makes this particular accident stand out from the others.

The Horseshoe Curve still enjoys a certain amount of appeal for Canadian railway historians ardent enough to search it out. A walk along the abandoned roadbed, (and if you're lucky, a guided tour by Mr. Baxter who now owns the farm), is one that appeals to many railfans. Not much imagination is needed to picture the narrow gauge tenwheelers of the Toronto, Grey & Bruce as they blasted up the grade at a stately 5 m.p.h. Also, one may even visualize the C.P.R.'s #555 careening down the slope just before she tumbled off the rails. Indeed, Mr. Baxter is very enthusiastic in showing you the exact spot, and to take you to his yard where he exhibits a pile of bolts and wheels unearthed while plowing that section of his fields.

The Orangeville to Bolton line, which included the Curve, was a duplication of the Credit Valley mainline to Streetsville. As the Horseshoe's grades were more formidable, all traffic was eventually rerouted through the Forks and the rails taken up in the early 1930's. Almost as a final parting shot, the very last wrecking train through Mono Road hit and killed an onlooker. The rails of the Horseshoe had claimed another life, even in their final hour. The railway grade itself was sold to the farmers along the line, each purchasing his portion of the right-of-way for a dollar, and the sound of squealing flanges as trains rounded to the curve was heard no more.

