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The Manchester Wreck

by Mary Hamilton-Dann





The railroad wreckage attracted scores of curious onlookers. Some people as the two women in the foreground demonstrate, posed for photographs. Courtesy of Manchester Historical Society.



Unloading injured passenger from Rochester Junction at Rochester in the accident that killed 27 people. This is a caboose being unloaded in the Lehigh Valley Railroad freight yard. Courtesy of Manchester Historical Society.

Cover: The wreckage of the train after it fell from the railroad bridge. Courtesy of Butch's Restaurant, Shortsville. In old Lehigh Station on branch line between Canandaigua and Shortsville.

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The tracks today over the Canandaigua outlet are still used next to the removed set on the right where the accident occurred. Courtesy of Karen Brankacz.

The Manchester Wreck

by M. Hamilton-Dann

"You can get there from here," promised the Lehigh Valley Railroad, depending, of course, upon where you were and where you wanted to go. To underscore its claim, the Lehigh established a network of ostensibly independent railway lines in eastern Pennsylvania, creating a monopoly that provided service to areas by-passed by the big ones.

From a modest beginning in transporting coal from the Reading/Bethlehem area of Pennsylvania, the line burgeoned as a passenger carrier during the Golden Age of railroading. It was a long haul, so to speak, from Asa Packer's coal-laden river barges to his plush passenger trains that left Buffalo for New York City and Philadelphia, as little by little the pedestrian business of coal was ostensibly side-tracked in the competition for itchy-footed Americans. On station platforms along the way, the rich and not-so-rich rubbed elbows in a giant crucible of travel. Almost forgotten was the Lehigh's sooty image as a coal carrier and the fact that anthracite was underwriting its passenger trade.


At the apex of Lehigh's passenger service was the Black Diamond Express, inaugurated on May 18, 1896. Through the years its run from Buffalo to Jersey City and later to New York City never varied until the demise of Lehigh passenger service in 1958. Advertised as "the handsomest train in the world," its fittings were duplicated in other mainline express trains.

In addition to luxurious rolling stock, the Lehigh offered spectacular scenery, snaking through back-country New York state to the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania where lofty curves overlooked the wooded, river valleys of primeval land. On a summer day predating air-conditioning and sealed windows, one could, notwithstanding an occasional whiff of cinders from the locomotive, breathe the air of unspoiled America.

Inquiring minds could also learn about such things as double-heading (where two engines labored up steep inclines towing their burden) and journal boxes and trucks (the wheel assembly of railway cars). Knowledgeable male travelers recalled newspaper accounts of a wreck — somewhere else, of course. Meanwhile, the ladies anticipated their next on-board meal: gourmet dining, linen-clad tables, liveried waiters. In the late 1890's, one ordered *a la carte*. Blue point oysters on half shell were 25¢; roast prime ribs of beef cost 50¢; lamb chops with green peas 60¢. A cup of coffee was 10¢. In addition, a bewildering array of vegetables, fresh fruits, pastries and imported cheeses were offered for an average of 15¢. A wine list was furnished "on application to the conductor," usually a middle-aged man whose visored cap spelled authority.

Pollution conscious, the Lehigh boasted: "Water used on this car is from the Glen Summit Mountain Spring." However, it drew the line on 10¢ coffee drinkers. "No order or check issued for an amount less than 25¢ for each person."

As night descended, the gas lamps were lit, casting small blobs of light against gleaming brass reflectors. The mahogany paneling of diner and parlor cars and coaches shone deep red, imparting coziness reminiscent of home. Travelers gazed absently out the windows, meeting, not the dimness of an anonymous "out there," but their own reflection in plate glass against a backdrop of polished wood.

In fact, the entire car was of wood painted in Lehigh colors and adorned with its diamond-shaped logo . A pullman sleeper often bore the name "Asa Packer."

It was a Never-Never Land of luxury for those accustomed to oil cloth covers and homemade soup. With a sigh of contentment passengers rested their weary heads against the starched antimacassars protecting plush seats. Not everyone could afford a pullman sleeper.

Lehigh's plan to expand passenger and freight service materialized in 1905 with a branch line-single-track to Rochester, New York. It was later extended to the village of Hemlock with intermediate stations at Honeoye Falls, Lima and Livonia. The mainline passed a short distance north of the village of Honeoye Falls (approximately 14 miles south of Rochester). At the foot of Plains Road in Mendon a large passenger terminal was built, an ornate specimen of Victoriana with a long hooded platform. It became a focus of local interest. People drove by horse and buggy to stand on the platform and watch the bustle of loading and unloading. With warning hoots and clouds of steam, each train went its way: one eastward through a brush of trees, the other curving north toward Rochester. No one could figure out the exact routes of the branch line, since it disappeared far from village or highway. Rochester Junction was an unparalleled convenience for northbound and southbound passengers.

And coal? Those arriving at the tidy little brick station on Rochester's Court Street were more interested in how they got there than Lehigh's access to the Lake Ontario port. By a complex feat of engineering, the tracks reached Court Street over a wooden trestle that straddled the Genesee River and Erie Canal. It was almost worth the trip just to see it.

From its inception as a mill town, Rochester continued to retain its semi-rural character during the advent of light industry. As such, it was an ideal convention center, neither too large nor too small, and with attractions unavailable in neighboring Buffalo and Syracuse.

While the New York portion of Lehigh's route offered little to compete with Pennsylvania's spectacular terrain, it nevertheless

had its own pastoral charm; the trains, passing through woods, were often brushed by foliage. Small villages serviced the Line with railroad yards, repair shops and complex switching. At dusk, red, green and yellow lights on the gantries shone like stars as they signalled "proceed" or "wait on a siding." It was a part of railroading known only to those who worked it, and there was hardly a family in these railroad towns not connected with the Line. "Uncle So-and-So was switchman for forty years." "My father was an engineer on the Black Diamond Express." One family produced three generations of porters.

For country folk, train-watching was the day's principal diversion. They peered into the coaches and took a vicarious adventure as they imagined the glamorous lives of those who glided past in a cocoon of pampered leisure. And second only to train-watching was wreck-watching when some hapless vehicle strayed into the path of a Lehigh express. A short distance east of Rochester Junction, Lehigh's mainline traversed the Rochester-Honeoye Falls highway (Clover Street) on a grade crossing flanked at that time by steep approaches. After several disasters, a flashing signal was installed, thus depriving local folk of a questionable diversion.

The huge number of railway personnel of that day was not outweighed by bureaucracy. All were experts in their respective fields—from track-walkers who periodically inspected the rails to dispatchers who were responsible for a vast network of schedules; from foremen in charge of general maintenance to foremen held accountable for locomotive condition and capability. Indeed, no fact of railroading was neglected by the head office, including a team that literally breathed down the necks of Bethlehem rail producers. And while Lehigh top-brass was hot on the trail of its employees, the Interstate Commerce Commission shadowed top-brass, ever vigilant for infraction of rules in the interest of economy or speed.

Those in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, immigrants mostly, who toiled in the blast furnaces producing thousands of miles of steel rails, were taken for granted by the dilettantes who rode those rails.

Ironically, Lehigh had been unwilling (or unable) to purchase a line that traversed its own territory in the Valley and was forced to lease a right-of-way from the Philadelphia and Reading Line. Depending upon volume of traffic, one or two "Philadelphia" coaches on the Buffalo/New Jersey/New York run were detached at Bethlehem and coupled to another train for this 45-mile trip south over Reading tracks.

Unlike many lines, the Lehigh main routes were double track all the way. Thus the lowliest of the scores of hamlets found themselves in the mainstream of activity. No longer the boonies, they benefitted enormously from Lehigh business. For example, the sleepy village of Sayre, Pennsylvania, a railroad junction with extensive yards and car-shops, became a medical center with the establishment of Robert Packer Hospital.

The village of Manchester, New York, thirty miles east of Rochester Junction, marked the halfway point between Buffalo and the Pennsylvania border, one reason for its choice as a center for switching, car storage and repairs. The other reason was availability of a large tract of level land west of Main Street.

A typical railroad town, Manchester's no-nonsense ambiance was evidence that few got rich working for the Lehigh. There was a notable absence of manicured lawns, and house painting was a delayed project. It was steady employment, though, and the skilled could look forward to work, life tenure and a modest pension. And as long as the Lehigh prospered, so did local shopkeepers and professionals.

Manchester was an agglomeration of simple frame houses on streets that forked this way and that to accommodate the hill terrain. Main Street (now Rte. 21), straight as an arrow toward Shortsville a half-mile south, passed over Lehigh's mainline on a grade crossing (the present underpass was constructed in 1931).

"The Yards" was a town in itself containing a sprawling round-house where locomotives were stored and repaired; a labyrinthine grid of tracks; a hefty water tower; the Koppers Company shops where ties were saturated with creosote; round storage bins for grain with their funnels protruding along sidings; miles of freight cars some of which read: "When empty,



Grade-level crossing between Manchester and Shortsville before the underpass was built. On left is the original LeHigh Valley Railroad depot. Courtesy of Manchester Historical Society.

return to Buffalo point of origin." The cement monolith, a tunnel with dual-track system separated by a concrete barrier, was a coal dispenser. Freight cars passing through were loaded from above by means of a chute.

The Yards, as an institution, is best described by the fact that at one time it was the largest freight-transfer center in the world, later taking second place only to that in Chicago.¹ Tim Record, Manchester Town Historian, told the author in 1992 that a sign noting this fact was at one time posted at the approach to the Village. Loaded freight cars arriving here from all over the country, were sorted according to destination and appropriately re-routed. At the zenith of its activity, the Yards employed 900 men, each with a specialty. Identification cards listed such expertise as "turntable," "blacksmith," "section foreman."

Because of freight-orientation, Manchester's small passenger depot was more symbolic than practical. Originally located west of Main Street, it was later moved east of the crossing and subsequently demolished. Missing was the usual gantry with its red, green and yellow lights, since Manchester was not a scheduled stop on Lehigh's mainline passenger route. Passenger trains coasted through the yards at reduced speeds and continued on their way.

The Yards provided what the town otherwise lacked—activity on a grand scale. Blasts from locomotive steam whistles, far from being a village nuisance, were welcomed as evidence that the iron horses on which Manchester fed were alive and healthy.

In addition to the Black Diamond's sobriquet "the Honeymoon Express" (Niagara Falls), the Lehigh was also "the Finger Lakes Special," — skirting north of all five lakes. For example, six hundred feet east of Manchester Yards, the tracks passed over Canandaigua Lake outlet on a steel-deck bridge. But although "outlet" suggested a mere trickle, it was in fact a veritable river. From bridge to pebbled bed was a drop of 45 feet, and jaded Lehigh personnel look forward to the view as relief from woods and flat countryside. In spring, Manchester's river, swollen by seasonal rain, sparkled with sunlight filtering through the foliage of ancient trees bending along its banks as it gushed northward to join other streams. It was a bucolic scene that relieved the harshness of a work-a-day community.

In contrast to Manchester, neighboring Shortsville was overtly prosperous. Money flowing from a diversified economy built substantial homes and public buildings. From a single-track spur, its sizeable railway station accommodated the affluent on their way to and from Canandaigua and lake resorts.

The next town east of Manchester was scenic Clifton Springs and its sanatorium whose regimen of mineral water attracted the rich and famous worldwide. In deference to its elegant clientele, the Lehigh built an equally elegant station. From there, distinguished "patients" trudged uphill to the sanatorium, their nostrils assailed by the stench of sulphur water flowing through the Spa's grounds.

The Wreck at Manchester

In late August of 1911 the Grand Army of the Republic held their periodic encampment at Rochester. Trooping into Convention Hall (now housing Geva Theater) were men in their seventies and those of middle age who had been mere lads during the conflict. Before a full house, officers were elected, pension increases were debated and procedures for Memorial Day observances were codified. Yawns were forgotten when someone got up and protested against the statue of Confederate General

Robert E. Lee in Washington's Hall of Fame. Lee was further vilified when the chairman announced that a statue of Lee was to be erected at Vicksburg National Park. "I denounce," shouted a voice from the hall, "the action of those who give honor to a traitor to his country!" Subsequently, a committee voted to postpone a decision to protest the statues.

At the convention's conclusion, members of U.S. Grant Post #5 boarded two special coaches at Court Street for the trip south to Rochester Junction where the cars would be coupled to Lehigh Train Number 4. Some would, no doubt, have preferred the Black Diamond, but it was peak travel season and the Line was heavily booked. Likewise, the Black Diamond's schedule did not allow for frequent stops to discharge passengers.

Arriving at the Junction, GAR veterans waited in their coaches for Number 4 from Buffalo. The temperature was a comfortable 68 degrees, moderate for that time of year in western New York. Number 4 was customarily an eight-car train: one locomotive, express car, baggage car, three coaches, Pullman sleeper and a parlor car. The dining car was last in line.

On August 25, however, it was a double-header made up to pull fourteen cars, all of them heavily loaded. Two of Lehigh's sturdiest locomotives were assigned to the run. Since the parlor car "Emblyn" was to be detached at Bethlehem, it was out of the usual order and immediately ahead of the two Rochester coaches; both of the latter would be coupled to another train at Bethlehem, along with the "Philadelphia" coach which was booked to capacity.

Number 1 behind the locomotive was the express car. Numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8 were coaches filled with passengers who would leave the train at various station stops along the main Buffalo/New Jersey/New York route. The Pullman sleeper "Austin," Number 9 in line, originated in Chicago and carried "through" passengers.

Having left Buffalo at 10:35 a.m., a half hour later than scheduled, Number 4 reached the Junction at 12:04 where there was another delay occasioned by switching and coupling of the two Rochester coaches. Now forty-five minutes late, it lumbered out of the Junction and shortly thereafter was passed by the west-bound Black Diamond; the east-bound Black Diamond had left Buffalo two hours ahead of Number 4. Passing through the

villages of Mendon, Victor and Farmington, Number 4's next scheduled stops were Clifton Springs and Geneva at the head of Seneca Lake. There were no stops at the intermediate villages of Manchester, Phelps and Oaks Corners.

Speed was not a priority for engineer Fred Callan, pilot of locomotive #2476. Since the first engine weighed in at 196,500 pounds and the other at 198,000, he was taking no chances that, in case of emergency, the series of air-brakes throughout the train would fail to stop forward momentum. Thus, although 60 mph was average, he kept his train at speeds between 45 and 50 mph.

George Bowman was engineer of the second locomotive #1804, and he worked in close coordination with Callan to insure that one engine did not attempt to out-pace or lag behind the other. In short, the two locomotives operated as one. Both engineers were accompanied by foremen of the Buffalo Division. Joseph Wright, of Buffalo, was Callan's fireman.

Not far ahead at the Manchester Yards, steam would be shut off allowing the train to "coast" through the Yards at a mandated speed limit of 25 mph. Like all signal towers of the Lehigh, that at Manchester was an automatic electrical device that inactivated the manually operated signals in case of emergency. For example, a broken rail or malfunction of the switching system activated a signal. The tower was manned by an experienced crew. Dewey Rice of Geneva, superintendent of the signals division that included Manchester, was on duty August 25.

Aboard one of the rear coaches was twenty-year-old Mrs. Harry B. Smith and her infant daughter, Frances. Her husband was an engineer on the Lehigh at Manchester and she had been visiting him there. Homeward bound to Waverly, New York, she left the train at Sayre, Pennsylvania and took a local to Waverly. Another Waverly person was Harry Becker, affectionately called "Dad" by his fellow workers on the Lehigh where he was a brakeman.

Timothy Madden, accompanied by his wife and six-year-old son, Francis, was on his way home to Trenton, New Jersey after several days of sightseeing at Niagara Falls. They had boarded the Philadelphia coach at Buffalo. Also on the Philadelphia coach were 64-year-old Henry Pownall and daughters Helen and Estelle. Helen was the cautious type, and before leaving Buffalo she had tucked a note into her purse: "In case of accident, please notify Wesley A. Pownall of Newtown, Pennsylvania."

DINING CARS, SERVICE À LA CARTE.



BY PINTSCH GAS.

ACK SCENIC HIGHWAY.



EQUIPPED WITH AUTOMATIC ELECTRIC BLOCK SIGNALS.

TRAINS LIGHTED

From time to time, passengers in the rear coaches wandered into the parlor car where lounge chairs offered relief from stiff-backed coach seats. And since it was lunch time, others passed through to the diner which opened after the train left Rochester Junction. It was all very convenient. In the Philadelphia car Miss Fanny Gruber, who had been spending time at Niagara Falls, was chatting with the young mother and grandparents of a small boy playing in the aisle. Meanwhile, Fanny was thinking about lunch. She had an early breakfast before leaving Buffalo. Excusing herself, she got up and started for the dining car. Fraternizing in the Philadelphia coach was widespread, as strangers took to each other in the way of those who have confidences to share without the constraint of over-familiarity. It was easy to be friendly when the conversationalists knew they wouldn't be seeing each other again. Mrs. Jeanette Madison was describing to a young mother with an infant child the details of her visit to Rochester: "I stayed with friends on West Avenue," she explained, and went on to detail events connected with the Encampment.

In the parlor car every seat was occupied. A frail veteran, his faded blue uniform bedecked with medals, sat pensively beside his aged wife, reflecting on the parade in which he had recently participated. Both wondered aloud if they'd be around for the next Encampment. They were Mr. & Mrs. Smith of Smithville, New York. Fellow veteran Dr. Edward Pangborn was entertaining similar thoughts. Now over seventy, he was returning home to Brooklyn for perhaps the last time. Another aged veteran named D.M. Belt had come all the way from California to attend the Encampment. With him were several women relatives. Most of the very elderly were accompanied by a wife or younger sister or daughter. Vida and Hortense Salisbury, sisters in fact as well as nuns at Geneva Convent, had journeyed to Philadelphia to bring their aged grandfather, Captain Robert Salisbury, to the Encampment. Now on their way home, they left their seats in the Rochester coach and were ensconced in the parlor car.

Eleven-year-old Esther Taylor was traveling with her grandmother to Pennsylvania. This seemingly independent young miss was a paradox, hugging her doll and primly straightening her be-ribboned straw hat in the manner of a grown-up. Three nurses from the Pennsylvania State Hospital, returning to work after a brief vacation, watched her with amusement.

Sarah Jane Dutton of Vineland, N.J. elected to remain in the Philadelphia coach when her seat-mate, Elizabeth White, moved into the parlor car. There was a constant coming and going between the two coaches as passengers exchanged seats, often waiting in the vestibule for a likely opening. Captain Robert Hansbury, past commander-in-chief of American Veterans of Foreign Service who, together with his wife, had been attending a veterans' convention in Buffalo, waited in the vestibule. Parlor car comforts enticed them from the Philadelphia coach.

Fannie Gruber found a seat in the crowded diner and was studying the menu when a waiter approached to take her order. Meanwhile P.C. Coley, a porter on the parlor car "Emblyn," thought the train was going to stop at Manchester, and opened the forward vestibule to receive passengers, but instead Number 4 continued on its way. In order to get a better view down the Canandaigua Outlet, he remained on the lower step. Suddenly a spark flew from under the train, followed by a shower of sparks. He turned and jumped up the steps and into the car. "Look out, everybody," he shouted, "there's going to be . . ."

Both locomotives and cars one through eight, cleared the bridge when engineer Callan heard two short blasts from the air tube. Bringing his train to a sudden halt, he jumped from the cab and ran toward the bridge.

In the forward Rochester coach, Frank Finer, a Lehigh employee in charge of Veteran safety, heard a crash and promptly pulled the emergency brake, stopping the car at the edge of the embankment. The car left the rails and tilted over the north track. Passengers were jarred and jerked from their seats. Frank Finer ran outside of the train.

The sparks seen by porter Coley came from under the Philadelphia coach. It had struck a broken rail, jumped track and bumped along the ties about sixty feet short of the bridge. The train had been gathering speed and dragged the coach along to the middle pier of the bridge where it tore loose from the "Emblyn" and diner and toppled 45 feet to the stream bed below. The diner was pulled off the rails. It toppled and rolled half-way down the embankment where it landed on its side — roof down — stopped by a telegraph pole pushed out of line.

The parlor car "Emblyn," careened off the bridge to land with its forward end in the stream bed, the rear end in the air about fifteen feet above the deck of the bridge.

Fannie Gruber remembered: "Over went the car after reeling along the track, and I found myself mixed up among tables, dishes and other people in the car. . . . The men in the car were heroes. They grabbed whatever they could to punch a hole for escape and then they helped the women out. The car I had left but a few minutes before lay in the bottom of the river, and a little later I saw them bring out first a little child who for miles back had been playing in the aisle. The child was alive and crying piteously for its. . . . It is too horrible to talk about!"

When the Philadelphia coach left the bridge, it fell with a twisting motion causing its forward end to crash into the east abutment of the bridge. In falling, it turned partly over with the forward end of the train bottom up and the rear end on its side. Both floor and roof were similarly curved. Seconds later it was a crumpled heap of splintered wood and steel with roof and floor barely three feet apart. Only a few persons were taken out alive.

Sarah Jane Dutton was among the lucky ones. Although badly bruised, she became the sole raconteur of how it was in the Philadelphia coach. "I felt three or four bumps and then that awful plunge. I was near the forward end and clutched for the overhead baggage rack; then everything went dark. When I came to my senses I was in a mass of broken seats and racks with the dead and dying. Men and women were screaming. I tried to get out, but it seemed as if the weight of the whole car was upon me. When I got sufficient strength, I drew my arms out of the tangled mass and they were smeared with blood. Finally I worked myself loose and men threw me a rope and passed it over my shoulders and pulled me out."

Sarah Jane's former seatmate, Elizabeth White, must have wondered at fate or the chance that removed her to the "Emblyn." "I heard a terrible noise," she recalled. "The coach was full of people and they were all thrown to the front or lower end of the car. Three people who had been seated near me were killed. I crawled out through a window."

Other accounts by survivors were in agreement; grinding, swaying, falling, losing consciousness. Captain Hansbury and his wife fainted. "When we came to," he related, "we waited nearly twenty minutes for rescue; but it seemed like twenty hours." Mrs. Jeannette Madison remembered nothing except falling. "When I recovered consciousness, I was lying clear of the wreckage. A short distance away was the woman with whom I

had been talking. Clasped in her arms was her baby. Both appeared to be dead. And I hadn't talked with her long enough to learn her name!"

There were no words from Timothy Madden and his family; nor from Henry Pownall and daughters Helen and Estelle; nor from veterans Smith and Pangborn. All were instantly killed, together with twenty-one others. Many of the seriously injured died while being rescued. The general carnage defied description. Some lost noses, limbs and entire scalps. The injured were sorted out from among the debris and carried, one at a time, often by those who were themselves injured. Vida and Hortense Salisbury, although bruised and shaken, took part in the rescue.

Young Mrs. Smith of Waverly was among the most severely injured. Tossed to the lower end of the parlor car "Emblyn," she suffered a skull fracture and dislocated leg. With the entire lower part of her face shaved off by contact with a shattered window, she nevertheless remained conscious long enough to hand her little daughter Frances through a broken window to waiting rescuers.

Word of the wreck spread like wildfire through Manchester and Shortsville, bringing crowds to the site within minutes. George Carpenter, a Lehigh engineer, happened to be at Manchester Station. "I didn't hear the crash," he reported, "but saw the boys running. Somehow I got it into my head that there was a fight. I shall never forget what I saw. I only wish I could."

An emergency telegraph hot line was established and word sent to Lehigh headquarters in Bethlehem for relief trains. One was dispatched from Rochester to the Junction where it was hastily switched to the main line. Others started from Buffalo and Geneva. As the improvised Rochester train pulled away from Court Street, several physicians, who were summoned late, jumped aboard the moving train. One of them was Dr. Frank Dow, a leading surgeon.

Waiting in Rochester for the relief train to return was Major Charles Douglass, son of Frederick Douglass. The Major had been commander of one of the black regiments that distinguished itself during the Civil War. Now a veteran, he was called from the convention floor to attend to the needs of his comrades when they returned to the city.

By the time physicians arrived from Clifton Springs, Geneva and Canandaigua, clean-up had already begun. The dead were laid in rows along the water's edge; the seriously injured were taken to various buildings in Manchester to await attention; clothing and hats and luggage were piled in heaps along the tracks, their bloodstains grimly suggesting that they might not be reclaimed.

It was otherwise with young Esther Taylor. Mrs. Eiseline, wife of the Shortsville coroner, found her wandering among the crowd. "Is this your doll?" queried Mrs. Eiseline, holding up a battered relic she had found among personal effects stacked in the Manchester Station waiting-room. The girl nodded. "Come with me," continued the woman, "and we'll telegraph your family that you're safe."

"Oh no," replied the child. "I've already telegraphed my father and will leave on the evening train."

But she didn't leave as planned. *The New York Times* on August 27, 1911 reported the following:

"The bloodstained doll taken from the wreck (at Manchester) was returned today to Esther Taylor of Lansdowne, Penna. who is at Clifton Springs helping to nurse her grandmother, Mrs. George D. Taylor of Plymouth Avenue, Buffalo. The woman was seriously injured in the wreck, but the girl was thrown through an open window by the force of the accident. She attracted much attention among the survivors by her remarkable calmness.... She abandoned the doll yesterday to go to her grandmother's bedside, but it was taken to her today."

When the first relief train arrived back at Rochester Junction, a crowd was already gathered on the platform. Rumors abounded: the Black Diamond had been wrecked at Manchester; everyone aboard had been killed or fatally injured; there was a fire and several coaches had incinerated their occupants.

In fact, the "fire" was set by Lehigh wrecking crews dispatched from the Yards. Large cranes lifted the "Emblyn" and diner onto the bridge, but after the Philadelphia coach was thoroughly searched for bodies and all luggage was removed, the wreckage collected and burned.

There was nearly another tragedy as "Emblyn" was being attached to cables for raising by crane. Several workmen were climbing down its side when it suddenly lurched and fell into the stream. Fortunately, the men managed to jump free as they felt it go.

Beset by injury and death on one of its best trains, Lehigh faced a monumental public relations problem. Wrecks of any kind were bad for business, but one of this magnitude could spell ruin. There was no way, of course, to muzzle the ubiquitous press and its nose for sensation, but at least the wreckage could be removed — and it had better be soon!

The wreck occurred shortly after 1 p.m. and by mid-afternoon sightseers had arrived from as far away as a hundred miles. Some brought a picnic lunch which they spread out on the stream banks, alternately eating and staring at the wreckage and watching the workmen trying to bring order out of chaos. Torn rails were being ripped up and replaced and the topsy-turvy mess of coaches were towed to the Yard. By nightfall there was little more to see and the curious gathered themselves up and headed home.

With the north track finally cleared of leaning coaches, the Black Diamond whizzed by on schedule, its passengers craning their necks as the train approached the bridge. Rumors of the disaster had traveled eastward with the speed of light. Earlier west-bound trains were rerouted from Geneva to Lyons where they continued on New York Central tracks, thereby frustrating those passengers eager to verify rumors of how it was at Manchester.

At the far end of the train, engineers Callan and Bowman and their crews were replaced, and subsequently the locomotives and undamaged cars one through five left for Geneva with a number of seriously injured who would be cared for at Geneva Hospital. Cushions from the smashed coaches had been retrieved to make beds on the relief trains. Also aboard were those who had the good fortune to be riding in the forward cars. Upon arriving at their destinations, they could tell the story of the year, if not the decade.

It was not thus with relatives who hurried to Manchester where they beseeched anyone who would listen for news of loved ones. They crowded into Stoddard Funeral Parlor and a makeshift nursing station set up in the basement of the YMCA,

fearful of what they would find. By this time, however, the seriously injured, numbering seventy-four at the outset, were already scattered among area hospitals. In Rochester Homeopathic, Mrs. Joseph Hickey, Susan Everett and Willis Rundle lay unconscious, each with a fractured skull. Instantly killed in the wreck were Mrs. Hickey's husband and daughter. Willis Rundle was a mail clerk on Number 4, and shortly before the wreck he had left car Number 2 for one of the rear coaches. Brakeman Harry Becker died on the relief train. Veteran Bent died on a stretcher as he was being carried into St. Mary's Hospital. To Rochester General Barbara Brandell, Silas Draper, and others were brought with serious fractures. Hahnemann Hospital received Amy Lawrence who was too badly hurt to be told that her sister Mabel lay in the improvised morgue at Manchester. The same with Mary Hassett whose sister was taken from the Philadelphia coach to the Shortsville morgue.

Young Mrs. Smith was rushed to Canandaigua's Thompson Memorial Hospital where a team of doctors informed her husband: "It is not possible for her to survive." Because of her bizarre facial injuries, the press focused on her condition and subsequent death. Mary Hassett, too, died in the hospital.

A Trenton, New Jersey newspaper wrote: "Three hearses were used here today for the funeral of Timothy Madden, his wife and son, victims of the Manchester railroad wreck. So many persons attended the services at St. Joseph's Church that the police reserves had to be called to prevent a panic. Three young orphans were the mourners."

At Clifton Springs Sanatorium/Hospital, thirteen victims were being treated for fractured limbs, skulls and internal injuries. For young George Palmer Thomas, M.D., a new member of the x-ray staff, it was an extended learning experience not unlike that of a field surgeon during battle.

The wreck had to be investigated. Engineers Callan and Bowman were called to testify before the Interstate Commerce Commission. The questions were searching: Had they been speeding through the Yards? Had they disregarded the red signal "danger ahead?" Their responses were unequivocally negative. Next, objective experts produced the broken rail that had collapsed under the Philadelphia coach. The rail had been carved into seventeen sections for inspection.

While the investigation was long and exhaustive, the outcome was surprisingly simple. The aberrant rail was "piped," that is it left the rolling mill in Bethlehem with an air hole extending most of its length, causing it to give way under pressure. Why at that precise moment? There was no concrete evidence to sustain a theory. Could the "pipe" have been detected from visual inspection? The answer from rail specialists was "no." A debate ensued about the relative merits of "open hearth" versus Bessemer processes of steel production, but without definitive conclusions.²

Mr. Record said that in a Sperry publication, *Railroad Inspection*, he had read a statement that the piped rail causing the Manchester disaster was the only recorded instance of an internal rail defect in the annals of American railroading.

And what about double-heading? "We do it regularly," declared Lehigh officials, "and without deleterious results." Nevertheless, for a considerable period thereafter, no one observed a double-header on Lehigh tracks.

There were a number of ironies resulting from happenstance. For example, why the defective rail at that particular point? Located anywhere else it would hardly have produced such a cataclysm; at worst, bruises and shock but no river tumble. And why, in the battered coaches, did some live and others die? It was a question the survivors must have asked themselves many times during the past years to come. Conductor James Hillock, too, wondered at the kind hand of Fortune. Upon leaving the diner, he stepped across the vestibule and had just opened the Austin's door when the diner left the rails. Looking behind he saw the coupling wrenched loose, leaving a gaping hole where he had stood only seconds before.

And the haphazard movement of passengers from coach to parlor car to diner. Because the dead could not speak for themselves, "who" was "where" at the precise moment of the crash was often determined by the condition and location of head gear: veterans' caps, ladies' hats, gentlemen's fedoras and straw boaters. One deceased woman was incorrectly identified because she was wearing her sister's initialled brooch.

Of the entire locomotive crew and accompanying supervisors, only George Bowman, engineer of locomotive Number 2, witnessed what transpired. He said, "I happened to be leaning from

the cab," he reported, "and saw the coaches topple." It must have been Bowman who signalled engineer Callan on the air tube.

The final irony was that of veterans killed in the wreck. Having survived the battles of Fredricksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg and the Wilderness, they were overtaken by death riding an iron horse one balmy August afternoon in a small village far from home.

For days following the wreck, headlines in Rochester papers, eye-wrenching black ink above columns of description, marched side by side with the mundane: John Barrymore was co-starring in *Uncle Sam*, a comedy-farce playing at the Lyceum Theater; McCurdy & Norwell Company advertised women's pumps at \$3.50, sweaters at \$3.95. And at the conclusion of one harrowing account of the wreck the following: "Zinc etchings make newspaper advertisements distinctive and eye-catching. Leave your order at the job printing department of the *Democrat & Chronicle*." The *Union & Advertiser* allowed itself kudos: "Half an hour before a local newspaper reached the streets, the *Union's* first extra appeared." However, the *Union & Advertiser* had a built-in scoop; one of its staff was a passenger on Number 4.

Human factors aside, the bottom line was money. Lehigh estimated that in claims alone its losses would top three quarters of a million dollars (\$8,250,000 in today's currency). This, together with the additional cost of repairs, equipment replacement, etc., could easily absorb the current revenue from passenger traffic.

Although Lehigh appeared to recoup its losses, the following decade was touch-and-go as automobile fever swept American travelers from the rails. As early as 1924 there was evidence that the railroad was in financial difficulty. "Reorganization" was the buzz word. In 1949, with profits from World War II as carrier for troops and war supplies, it began up-grading to diesel power and streamlining. Yet despite efforts to compete with more prosperous rivals, Lehigh was losing momentum. The second bell sounded in 1954 when it was forced to close the Court Street Station and bus a mere handful of passengers to Rochester Junction.

Then in 1958 the third bell rang when Lehigh petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon passenger service on its entire run, saying that it was losing \$7,500 a day on passenger traffic (approximately \$37,500 by contemporary standards).



Ambulances lined up to carry injured passengers to area hospitals. Everyone is dressed in coats. Courtesy of Manchester Historical Society.

Today, the only whistle sounding through the Yards is that of an athletic director on the playing field of Manchester Central School, located on land adjacent to what is now a graveyard of abandoned ties and rails, a decaying round-house and buildings, derelict coal-tower and rusted freight cars.

One may still walk the bridge where the accident occurred, but the south rails have been removed. Through gaps in the deck one observes the river as it gushes along, serene and indifferent to human events. On an evening in late August, its passage is the only sound in a wilderness of silence. Eastward in the distance a pair of abandoned freight cars stand silhouetted against the sky.

Mary Hamilton Dann is a member of the National Railway Historical Society, Rochester Chapter. She has been researching railroads for ten years and is particularly interested in the Lehigh Valley Railroad. For the author, the wreck of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Train Number 4 at Manchester, New York, was a family legend handed down by antecedents who were on the platform at Rochester Junction August 25, 1911.

Endnotes

1. Tim Record, Manchester Town Historian, told the author (1992) that a sign noting this fact was at one time posted at the approach to the Village.
2. Mr. Record said that in a Sperry publication, *Railroad Inspection*, he had read a statement that the piped rail causing the Manchester disaster was the only recorded instance of an internal rail defect in the annals of American railroading.

Back cover: Lehigh Valley Railroad Roundhouse visible on right. Manchester was a switching hub for the railroad as well as a repair center. Courtesy of Manchester Historical Society.

