

(Article taken from the Victoria Daily Colonist, Thursday, August 18, 1898)

Trent River Train Disaster

An Accident On The Coal Railway At Union Results In The Death of Six Men

The Central Span Collapsed And Train and People Plunged Into Trent River

By the collapse of the centre span of the Trent River railway bridge yesterday morning, while the first loaded train of the day from the Union colliery was crossing it on its way to the shipping point at Union Bay, the locomotive and 20 cars dropped full 100 feet into the stream below, the cars piling upon each other in the rocky ravine, and the majority of those on board the train meeting death or receiving injuries so serious as to make their recovery problematical. The dead are:

Alfred Walker, engineer: Leaves a widow and five children. His death was practically instantaneous, for a terrible cut on the head made his agonies short. His intestines were also protruding when his quivering body was picked up, and life was quite extinct;

Alexander Mellado, brakeman: Leaves a widow and infant. He was a son of Bruno Mellado, head carpenter at the mines. Both his legs and one arm were cut off, and his internal injuries were also of a necessarily fatal nature;

Richard Nightingale, contractor: Leaves a widow and family resident in Nanaimo city. He had been paying a visit to the mines on business, and was returning home;

William Work: The son of James Work, another local contractor, and the only unmarried man among the white victims of the accident, was on his way to Union, and was killed by falling upon his head. It is reported that his neck was instantly broken;

Two Japanese workmen, names not given as yet, complete the death roll.

The injured are:

Hugh Grant, fireman: Has both legs broken and one arm. He is not expected to live;

Miss Frances Horne, daughter of William Horne, blacksmith, of Union wharf: Badly scalded and cut, but may recover;

Miss Villa Grieves, daughter of Geroge Grieves: Is also badly cut and burned, but hopes are entertained for her recovery;

Matt Piercy, the second brakeman: Saved himself almost miraculously by jumping on the swinging wreck of the bridge as the locomotive went over, and crawling back over the trembling timbers to safety. He can give no connected description of the accident, for it was to him all over in an instant. He heard a grinding and splintering of timbers, a crash, a plunge of heavy bodies, a sound of rushing steam, and a chorus of shrieks as men were hurried into eternity. When he jumped he could see the train falling, and he looked and called for his mate. Then his vision was shut off by the clouds of steam and coal dust coming from below.

The Trent River bridge is on the Union Colliery Co.'s coal railway, a private line connecting the mines and the wharves. The bridge, approached by trestles, spanned a deep ravine, through which the river pours between steep and wooded banks at a point seven and a half

miles from Union Bay. The bridge was a wooden structure, ten years old, but well maintained and regarded as thoroughly safe for the traffic put upon it. Yesterday's train consisted of the locomotive and twenty cars, each with 23 tons of coal, every one of which went through. It was the long, or river span, that failed.

When the first rescue party reached the scene, the engine lay on its side, a mass of tangled iron spread over a pile of boulders, and surrounded by the debris of the bridge. On the other side were heaps of coal and coal cars; while twisted rails, pipes from the engine, tangled timbers, and beams were strewn everywhere.

Nicholas Walker and William Bell were under the bridge when the train went through, waiting for contractor Nightingale, who was coming to inspect the structure and make repairs where they were found necessary. He was on his way down to the bridge when he met his fate. Bell ran to Union Bay to report the accident, and in a very short time hundreds of willing hands commenced to take the dead and injured out of the ruin. All the district is naturally thrown into deepest sorrow, and the families of the victims of the tragedy have the sincerest sympathy of the entire community.

During the afternoon a special train went up from Victoria bearing Mr. Dunsmuir, Mr. Bryden, Mr. Pooley, Mr. Joseph Hunter, Mr. Prior, Mr. Bell and others prominently connected with the colliery. These gentlemen will do all that is possible to facilitate the recovery of the injured.

The locomotive is damaged beyond repair, and the majority of the cars are in the same condition.