

GEORGE SWIFT HELD WITH NEGLIGENT HOMICIDE CHARGES AFTER TRAGIC CROSSING WRECK

George Swift drove the car, avrolet sedan, Friday night that bumped another car onto the South Main street crossing in the track of a fast passenger train that sent five persons to their deaths and wrecked the train.

Those killed in the crash wreck were: Gail McClintock, 38, farmer, living near Carlisle; his wife, Marie, 35, the mother of seven children resulting from three marriages; Floyd (Polly) Cook, 45, proprietor of a resort at Lacey Lake; and his wife, Mrs. Floyd Cook, 40; and Francis McCusker, 35, of Detroit who was riding on the train.

This most tragic accident in the annals of Vermontville history happened about 8:30 o'clock Friday night within the sound of the festivities of the Field day and homecoming celebration. Ex-Governor Wilber M. Brucker was addressing the crowd in the interest of the Republican candidate for the Governorship of Michigan, Frank D Fitzgerald, at the time.

Train Leaves Rails

The McClintocks and the Cooks, riding in one car, stopped at the railroad crossing as the warning signal began to flash. Swift, in his car, came up behind, failed to stop and bumped the car containing the four other persons onto the tracks, just as a fast Michigan Central passenger train reached the crossing.

After hitting the automobile, killing all four occupants almost instantly the train left its rails, the locomotive and tender upsetting in a ditch and killing an unidentified transient who was riding on the water tank.

With Swift in his car were Cecil Root, 18, and Allen Hummel, 18.

Hundreds of persons left the thronged streets of town and rushed to the scene of the accident.

Before the Ward ambulance arrived there was a string of approximately twenty cars already at the crossing looking over the wreck and viewing the marred bodies of the four occupants of the car. Who the first person was to arrive at the scene is not known as so many came immediately afterward. Nearby residents heard the shrill whistle of the steam escapng from the engine and one man, Mr. George Springett, viewed the train from an upstairs window of his home as it started to sway and finally crashed into the ditch.

As Engineer George Howland, of Jackson, applied the brakes, the train began to run into trouble which developed further tragedy. Apparently, officers said, a piece of steel from the automobile had become lodged in the locomotive pilot, and when the locomotive passed over a "frog" switch about 300 yds. west of the crossing the fragment caught between the rails, twisting the rail loose from the tie. The locomotive jumped the rails and began to rock back and forth.

"The fireman and I wanted to jump to safety but we couldn't tell which way the engine would tip so we clung to the cab and waited," Howland said. He and the fireman, Floyd Dennis, stayed in the cab as the engine plunged down a 10-foot embankment.

The locomotive nosed over, pulling the tender with it, but leaving the baggage car and three remaining coaches with their 17 passengers upright although derailed.

Two Others Escape

Riding on the tender were three transients, including the man who was killed, Harry Powers, 45, formerly of Hastings, and Tom Myers, 21, of Hastings.

Francis McCusker, 35, of Detroit was caught across the body by the tender and crushed into the side of the bank. The others were thrown clear. No relatives of McCusker were located, so his body will

be sent to the University of Michigan.

Powers, regaining his senses, saw the engineer and the fireman crawling out of the cab through a narrow opening left in the damaged locomotive. His fellow traveler on the tender was groaning and Powers made a vain attempt to release him. In the effort he found that one of the man's legs was torn loose from his body.

Engineer Howland, bleeding from a cut on his head, was assisted to the railroad station by the fireman, while the passengers and the rest of the train crew left the coaches to see what had happened. None of the passengers received injury. Warned by the premonitory swaying, they had clung to their seats until the train halted.

Body Finally Released

The bodies of the victims, with the exception of the transient who could not be released, taken to the Ward undertaking parlors were those of Mr. and Mrs. Cook while the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. McClintock were removed to the Pray funeral home, Charlotte. During the night, after a wrecker had arrived from Jackson, the transient's body was released and taken to the Cheney mortuary in Charlotte.

searched that McClintock's four months-old son, Floyd Frederick was with the party and parties searched along the dark right-of-way for the body. Friends of the family, who happened to be at the homecoming, assumed the difficult task of notifying the McClintock children of the tragedy.

Jess Tuttle, a neighbor, drove to the McClintock home and found most of the seven children sitting up waiting for their parents to come home. The infant was home and safely asleep. Tuttle called in neighbors who took charge of the stricken children.

Each Married Twice

Both McClintock and his wife had been married once before, their first marriage being terminated by death. McClintock had had two children by his first marriage and Mrs. McClintock also had had two children by her first marriage. From their own union three more children had resulted. Adam Hettmansperger, who operated Hettman's cafe in Charlotte, was Mrs. McClintock's first husband.

The Cooks had been living at the home of Lute Rolfe, only a quarter mile away from the McClintock farm, since a week ago when fire destroyed their own residence. Both families were widely known in Charlotte vicinity, Mr. Cook having operated the boat livery and grocery at Lacey lake near Carlisle.

Vermontville, soon after the double accident, was the point of convergence for state police and Eaton County sheriff's officers and newspaper men. Hundreds walked down the tracks to play flashlights on the overturned locomotive and to examine the tracks and the dead man pinned against the bank. The waiting room of the depot was crowded with curiosity seekers who had gathered and was a hum of voices as one endeavored to explain to the other how it all happened. Swift and Powers were being interrogated upon our arrival in the office of the ticket agent by Undersheriff Milton Krieg, Coroner Albert Cheney and Prosecutor John Wright.

Swift told his questioners, "I saw the signal light flashing as I drove up to the crossing," Swift said, "and I put on the brakes. I must have been going about 10 miles an hour when I crashed into McClintock's car which I did not see until after the crackup. It had no tail light. His car was shoved out onto the tracks where the train hit it."

Swift had no driver's license. The two boys with him told similar stories.

Powers, a former railroad switchman, said he had changed places on the coal tender only a few moments before the accident. He said

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