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Train wreck near Saline Bayou

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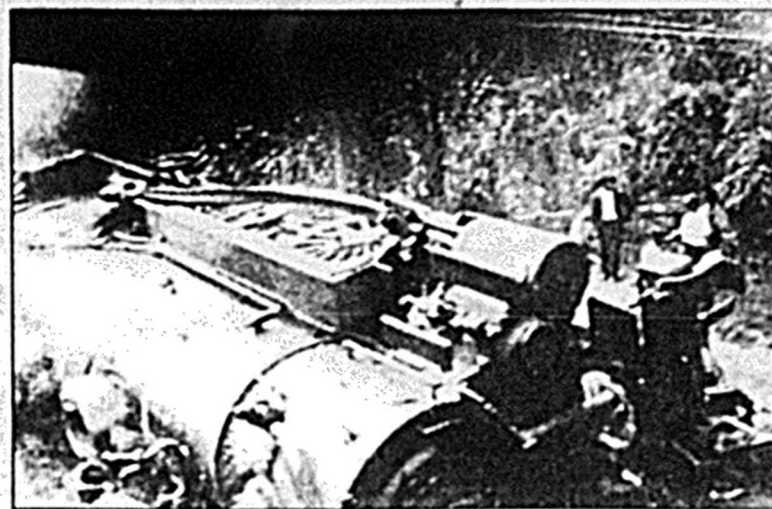
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Train wreck near Saline Bayou

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

The construction of the state's railroad system initiated major changes in transportation in this area and all of Arkansas, establishing new shipping and travel connections with the rest of the nation. In 1873, people came to Arkadelphia from as far away as fifty to sixty miles to watch for the Cairo and Fulton Railroad's first passenger train and to witness an event they would remember the rest of their lives. The Cairo and Fulton Railroad established Arkadelphia as a principal transportation hub in southwest Arkansas. The rail line later became a part of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern line that ran between Missouri and Texas. Then, it became a part of the Missouri-Pacific Railroad, and even later, the Union-Pacific.

But, train travel was not without danger. Accidents happened. And, about 100 years ago, in September of 1917, a significant train wreck occurred near Arkadelphia. Headlines screamed, "Big Train Wreck on

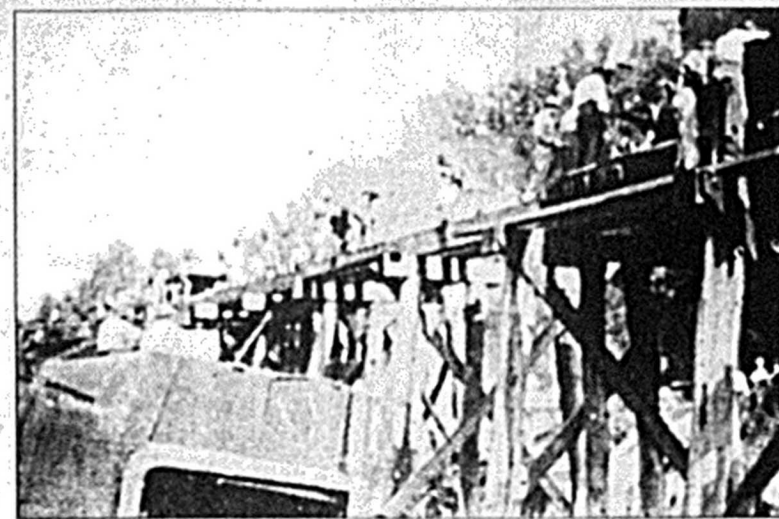


Saline Bayou: Engine with Two Coaches Turn Over, Off the Bridge." Fortunately, no one was killed in the accident, but rail traffic was disrupted for several days. Arkadelphia's Southern Standard newspaper reported it this way:

"All railroad traffic to the north was stopped on Tuesday morning when No. 4, the fast north-bound passenger train plunged off the Saline Bayou bridge two and a half miles north of town, and not only demolished the bridge but tore up considerable

track.

"The train was going at fast speed, being behind time, when a part of the engine underneath broke. The engineer immediately began to stop the train but the brakes on the engine were affected and he was not able to stop at once. When going about ten miles an hour the broken part under the engine struck in the cross ties and the engine was plunged head foremost off the bridge, carrying several cars with it. It is miraculous that several were not killed



IMAGES COURTESY OF OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY 1918 OUACHITONIAN YEARBOOK

instantly, but only the engineer and fireman and two mail clerks were seriously injured, while the passengers were only shaken up considerably. The engineer was caught under the engine when it fell, but was scalded worse than anything. All of the injured were brought to the station here and later taken to Little Rock and Texarkana."

The accident must have made quite an impression on locals, for the 1918 edition of the Ouachitonian, yearbook of Ouachita Baptist College, filled an entire

page with images of the wreck's aftermath. To view those photographs, go to page 135 of the Ouachitonian at <http://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/yearbooks/27/>

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clark-countyhistory.org or 230.1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245.5332).