

Cornelius Cox, Jr.

(7 Oct 1846 – 12 Jul 1888)

Cox. On Thursday morning, July 12, 1888, Cornelius Cox, son of Aroline and the late Cornelius Cox. Funeral from the residence of his mother, 426 N. Columbus street, Alexandria, Va., Saturday evening at 5 o'clock

The Evening Star, July 12, 1888

Through a Trestle

A Disaster This Morning on the Virginia Midland

A Train From This City Goes Down to Ruin Through a Trestle

Seven Killed and Forty Badly Injured

Particulars of the Accident

The train on the Virginia Midland Railroad which left here at 11 o'clock last night for the South met with a frightful accident about 2:30 o'clock this morning at a point 2 miles south of Orange Court House, Va. The train went through the trestle known locally as Fat Nancy's trestle, the engine and five of the cars attached to the train going down through the trestle and being badly wrecked. There were three Pullman sleepers on the end. The two rear ones remained on the track and were uninjured; the forward one went partly down, and rested partly upon the heap of wreckage below it and partly upon the track. Reports were received in this city this morning of the accident, stating the loss of life this morning of the accident, stating the loss of life as high as fourteen. More definite news received later was to the effect that seven people were killed and forty injured.

The Killed

The killed, so far as was known at the headquarters of the Richmond and Danville system in this city at noon today, were W.H. Whittington, a mail clerk, whose home is at Greensboro, N.C.; Mr. Cornelius Cox, of Alexandria, an assistant civil engineer on the road; a newsboy, and one passenger, whose names were not then known.

An Account From an Official Source

Gen. Randolph, the general manager of the Richmond and Danville system, gave a Star reporter an account of the accident from the brief particulars he had received, substantially as follows: There were seven cars on the train--a postal car, a baggage and express car, two passenger coaches, and three sleepers. The mail car, it is supposed, was derailed and struck and broke through the trestle, dragging the locomotive back after it. The baggage and two passenger coaches followed, going through the trestle, leaving the three Pullman cars upon the track, the forward one resting upon the wreckage below. The two passenger coaches fell upon the cars and locomotives that went down first.

The trestle was one of the last on the road to be filled, and a gang of men were employed on it at this time repairing it and filling it. It crosses a small branch, and according to Gen. Randolph's recollection is about 30 feet high.

At the Baltimore and Potomac depot a Star reporter was informed by railroad men that the trestle was 60 feet high.

The Mail Car

The mail car that went down first appears to have been badly wrecked. It left here last night with a crew of six men, and the official report received at the Post Office Department this morning was to the effect that Whittington was killed and his five comrades all injured. As the sleepers did not leave the track it is supposed that none of the passengers in them were seriously injured.

The Railroad Men

The train was the one known as No. 52, which leaves here at 11 o'clock for Danville. It was drawn by engine 694, John Watkins, engineer, and John Kelly, fireman, and, as stated above, was composed of seven cars. Neil Taylor, the conductor, was badly injured, and was reported today as in a dying condition. Kelly, the fireman, and James Goodwin, the baggage-master, were also badly injured. John Watkins, the engineer, according to reports received today, escaped uninjured. He saved himself, it is stated, by jumping from the cab of his engine.

A Wrecking Train

was sent from Alexandria at 5:30 o'clock this morning. Travel on the road was not interrupted by the wreck, as trains went North and South over the Chesapeake and Ohio line by way of Gordonsville. Railroad officials were active this morning arranging for the removal and care of the dead and wounded.

A Postal Clerk's Account

Mr. Millard Wood, mail clerk, who arrived in Washington this morning from the South, by way of Gordonsville, told a Star reporter that his train watered at Orange Court House, when he learned that, as near as could be ascertained, there were four killed, including conductor Neil Taylor, who was reported dying, and forty injured. There were six postal clerks in the mail car, he said. One of them, Whittington, was killed outright, and Jno. Q. West, of Washington, residing at 407 2d street northwest, seriously injured, and the other four more or less hurt. The baggage agent could not be found and he was included among the killed. Mr. Wood said that he considered the trestle to be ninety feet long and forty-five feet high, and that the entire train was on it when the engine went down.

Engineer Watkins, he said, although injured, was able to walk about when he passed Orange Court House. He is regarded as one of the best and most careful engineers on the road. He oils his engine oftener than any other engineer and pays strict attention to the rules governing speed, whistling, etc. He was not going over 5 miles an hour when he started across the trestle. He is known on the road as Mother Watkins, the name being given him because of the extreme caution with which he always runs his engine. Mr. Wood added that this train is always well loaded, because of the through connection it makes between Boston and New Orleans, Augusta and Atlanta. On an average it carries between 150 and 200 passengers. One of the sleepers, he said, was destined for White Sulphur Springs to be dropped at Charlottesville. This car, however, was the last of the train and remained on the track.

Three More Bodies Found

General Manager Randolph received further details of the accident this afternoon. In addition to the four persons enumerated above as dead, in clearing away the debris three more persons were found dead. They were passengers. Two of them were men and one was a woman, but at the latest accounts they had not been recognized. This makes the list of killed seven in all.

How the Accident Occurred

It appears from the information received this afternoon that it was not the postal car, but one of the passenger coaches in the middle of the train that ran off the track, causing the accident. It broke down

the trestle, dragging back the mail and baggage car and engine, which had passed beyond the point where the trestle broke and pulling them down to ruin with it.

Bringing the Dead to Alexandria

The train expected at Alexandria from the wreck arrived there late this afternoon, and brought two of the bodies of the dead. There were four injured persons who came to this city and went on to Baltimore.

Caring for the Wounded

Some of the wounded were taken to Charlottesville and some brought this way. A train from the wreck bringing some of the injured persons was expected at Alexandria this afternoon, and the general passenger agent went from this city to meet it and arrange for caring for the injured.. Gen. Randolph said that there was nothing to indicate the cause of the derailment. It appeared to be one of those accidents, he said, that might have occurred despite the best of care. Just before the train crossed the trestle a heavy freight train had passed over in safety. The passenger train, he said, followed, going slowly at a speed not exceeding ten miles an hour.

Mr. Cornelius Cox, the assistant engineer who was killed in the accident, was formerly city surveyor of Alexandria and a grandson of the late W.H. McKnight. The conductor, Neal Taylor, said to be fatally hurt, was also a resident of Alexandria.

A Dispatch From Charlottesville

says the trestle was 48 feet high, and was known to be weak, and the railroad company was engaged in filling it in. The dispatch continues:

The engine went down pilot end foremost, thus communicating no fire to the wreck. As soon as the accident occurred the engineer, who was but slightly injured, walked back to Orange and telegraphed for assistance.

"Dr. W.C.N. Randolph and other physicians left here on a special train for the wreck. The dead and some of the wounded were taken to Orange, while the more seriously hurt were brought to Charlottesville."

The Killed and Wounded

"As far as can be now ascertained, five were killed: C. Cox, of Alexandria, of the engineering department of the Piedmont Air Line, was instantly killed; H.T. Whittington, of Greensboro, N.C., postal clerk, lived ten minutes; H.C. Brightwell, postal clerk, of Prospect Prince Edward County, Va., lived until he reached the hospital; W.D. Parrott, of Albemarle County postal clerk, badly injured; J.Q. West and J.L. Walthall, of Washington, D.C. postal clerks, badly injured; Louis Jenkins, of Lynchburg, postal clerk, slightly injured; Potterfield, express agent, seriously injured; Z. Jennings, of Lynchburg, a passenger, internal injuries. Capt. C.P. Taylor, of Alexandria, who was in the car next to the smoker when the accident occurred, was hurt about the head and one leg was injured. The injured are estimated at about twenty-five.

The Evening Star, July 13, 1888

The Midland Disaster

Further Details of the Accident at Orange Courthouse

The Disaster Attributed to the Rottenness of the Trestle

The Scenes at the Wreck

List of the Killed and Wounded

Additional details received from the scene of the wreck on the Virginia Midland road at a trestle 2 miles south of Orange Courthouse, Va., early yesterday morning, show that the first accounts published in *The Star* last evening were not exaggerated. In fact, the loss of life was understated yesterday. As the mass of wreckage was cleared away other bodies were found and the list of dead had lengthened to nine this morning. The scene that followed the plunge of the train through the trestle was one of horror. The shrieks and moans of the injured and dying, the shouts of excited passengers, and the hissing of the steam, made a frightful pandemonium of sound. All the lights on the train were extinguished, and the mass of the wreckage was shrouded in darkness, which seemed to increase the awfulness of the moment. As soon as self-possession returned to the startled survivors of the disaster they went at once to work to rescue the injured and recover the bodies of the dead. The train was plied in such an inextricable mass of debris that it was difficult to discover the outlines of human forms. Through the interstices of the wreck arms and legs protruded in every direction. Fragments of wood were gathered and a bonfire started, which threw a weird light over the scene, enabling the uninjured to make their way about the wreck.

The Scene at the Wreck

Mr. George S. Shackelford, who was at Orange, was one of the first to arrive at the scene of the disaster after the alarm was given. "When we got there," he said, "the gray light of the dawning day disclosed a scene of indescribable horror. The dead and the injured, to the number of about twenty-five were lying on either side of the wreck. The cut, bruised, bloody faces of the dead presented a ghastly spectacle, and the living exhibited every expression of suffering. Others of the wounded, with back bruises and undressed and bleeding wounds, which under other circumstances would certainly have prostrated them, regardless of their own injuries were doing all that they could to relieve their more unfortunate fellow passengers. There was one woman in the party who worked nobly--I do not know her name. She was frail and delicate in appearance, had not had a berth in the sleeper, but had marvelously escaped unhurt from one of the wrecked cars. She continued her exertions unceasing until the last injured man was placed upon the relief train sent from Charlottesville. Her conduct was in striking contrast to that of some of the ladies from the Pullman cars, who displayed great anxiety for the rescue of their trunks. When the sun arose the people from the country around, who had gathered in considerable numbers, cut bushes and branches from the trees, and made arbors over the wounded."

Dr. Row, of Orange Court House, was early upon the ground, and did all that could be done until the arrival of the relief train, about 7 o'clock, which brought Dr. W.C.N. Randolph, the surgeon of the company. By Dr. Randolph's direction comfortable stretchers were quickly constructed of the doors of the wrecked cars and mattresses from the sleepers, and upon them the injured were carried up the hill to the relief train and then to Charlottesville.

Rotted Timbers in the Trestle

One hundred feet or more of the high wooden trestle gave way, and the timbers of that part, it is said, were rotted.

A coroner's jury met at Orange Court House this afternoon, and after visiting the wreck and the dead and hearing witnesses concluded that the accident and the resulting deaths were due to the rottenness of the timbers.

The Killed and the Wounded

The list of the killed so far as known this morning was as follows: Cornelius Cox, of Alexandria, assistant civil engineer of the road; W.F. Hunter and Chas. Francis, of Baltimore; J.N. Torrance of South Carolina; W.H. Waittington, United States mail agent, Greensboro, N.C.; H.C. Brightwed, postal clerk,

Prospect, Prince Edward County, Va.; Miss Alice Burns or Brown, of Highlands, S.C.; James Smith, of Washington, a newsboy; L.G. Cortez, of Louisiana.

About thirty-five were injured, some quite seriously. The list includes the following: W.D. Parrott, of Albemarle County, postal clerk, badly injured; J.Q. West and J.L. Waithall, of Washington, D.C., postal clerks, badly injured; Louis Jenkins, of Lynchburg, postal clerk, slightly injured; G.L. Kelly, fireman, badly scalded; John Watkins, engineer, slightly scalded; B.F. Sprinkle, North Carolina, hand hurt; E.T. Jones, Chatham, Va., internal injuries; Henry Conway, Philadelphia, slightly bruised; Mrs. Stockard, Graham, N.C., slightly injured; D.M. Gretlish, Augusta, Ga., face bruised; Prof. E.L. Barber, Washington and Lee University, slightly bruised; W.G. Abell, Atlanta, slightly hurt; L.P. Sherer, Hagerstown, Md., bruised. The bodies of Messrs. Torrance, Whittington, and Cox arrived in Alexandria last evening from the wreck. Torrance's body was prepared for burial and sent to South Carolina last night. The body of the newsboy, James Smith, was brought to this city at 11 o'clock last night. He lived on 11th street northwest, near the Boundary.