

Canadian 'colourist'
creates special work

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Happy hookers
meeting at church

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Colborne hockey peewees
in nail-biter

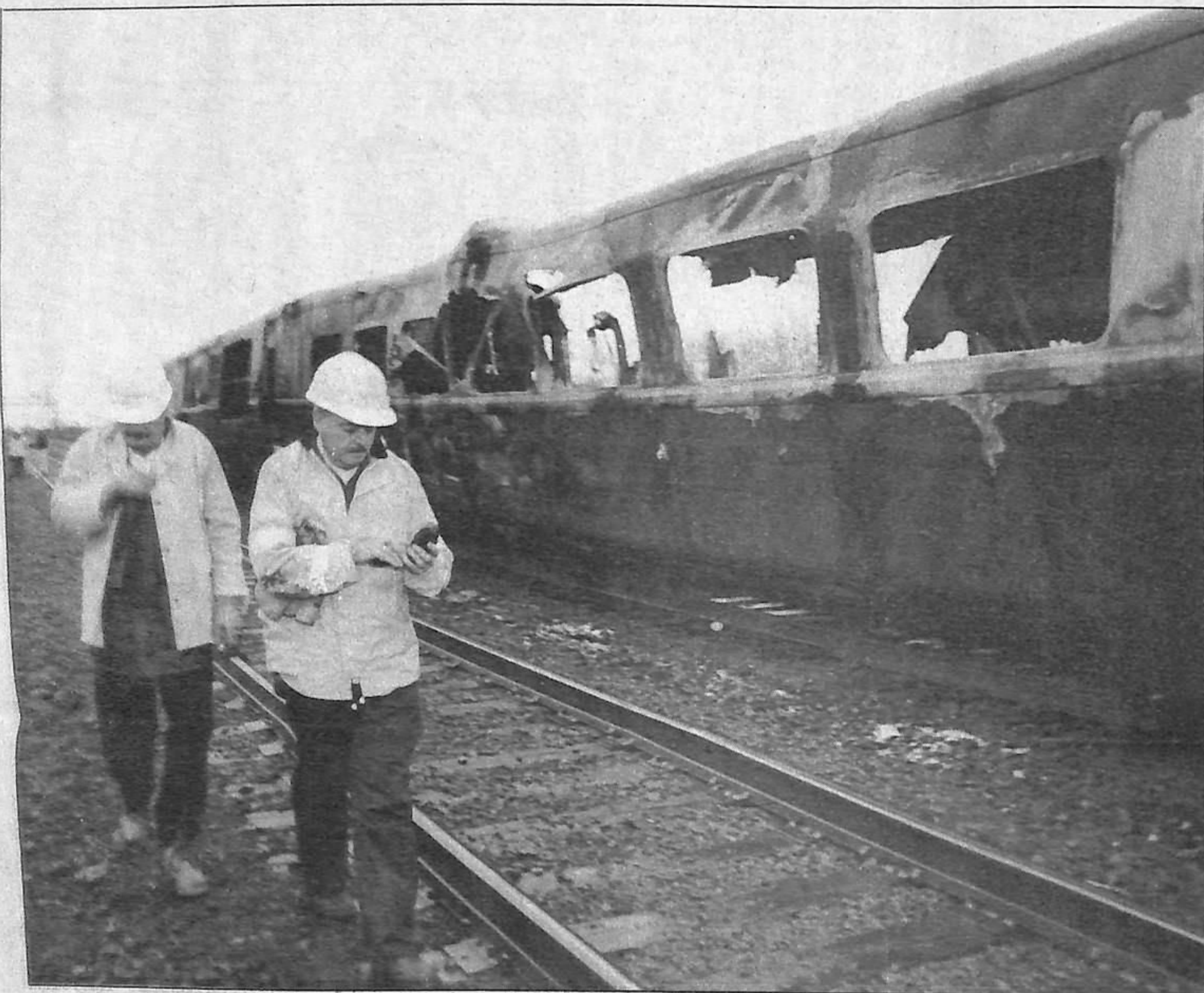
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Colborne Chronicle

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Train fire — Officials survey the wreck of Train 66, Monday morning after Sunday night's fire, caused by a 1.3-metre piece of rail laid across the line. Police are saying the rail was too heavy for children, or a lone adult to lift, and must have been placed on the line by at least two adults. Damage has been estimated at over \$3-million. Photo by Ted Amsden

Ball of fire

Passenger train bursts into flames at Brighton

By Robert Washburn

Police and investigators from the National Transportation Agency are investigating a dramatic train fire last night near Brighton in which more than 50 persons were injured.

An eastbound VIA express headed for Montreal from Toronto struck a metre-long piece of rail lying in the rail bed just after 6 p.m., rupturing the fuel tank under the engine and igniting more than 13,000 litres of fuel.

As the crew attempted to stop the train, the first-class passenger car became engulfed in fire, sending flames 10 metres into the night sky as the train passed through the town of Brighton.

The train, bearing about 400 passengers, finally came to a stop near Boes Road, about two kilometres east of the town.

Firefighters from Brighton, Murray Township and Colborne and ambulance crews had to struggle along a narrow, muddy road to reach the scene.

Brighton Deputy Fire Chief Brian Brose said today the scene was chaos when he arrived.

The 17 members of the train's crew were trying to get passengers off the train.

Some passengers in the first passenger car had smashed windows and jumped from the train before it had stopped.

"Our first priority was to get people away from the area," Mr. Brose said.

Brighton OPP, ambulance crews and a helicopter from CFB Trenton helped with the evacuation.

Hundreds wandered to a nearby farm house.

It took nearly two and a half hours to extinguish the fire.

Brighton Mayor Bill Pet-

tingill was responsible for co-ordinating the town's emergency plan.

Within 30 minutes, local buses were transporting people from the accident scene to East Northumberland Secondary School in Brighton, he said.

The Brighton Kinettes and Kinsmen, along with members of St. John Ambulance, were at the school with coffee and food even before people started arriving, he said.

All passengers except those with serious injuries were taken to the school until buses hired by VIA picked them up at about 11 p.m. to take them to their destinations — either Montreal or Dorval airport.

Several persons travelled back to Toronto in cabs at VIA's expense, Mr. Pettingill said.

About 52 people were transported directly to hospitals in Trenton, Belleville and Cobourg. About 18 were admitted with various cuts, bruises and burns. One person sustained a broken hip.

Mr. Pettingill said the town's emergency plan was executed without a hitch.

Dianne Graham, a spokesperson for VIA, said the train blocked the major route among Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. About 2,000 other VIA passengers were affected, as their trains were forced to wait until the burned engine and passenger cars were removed from the track by about 10:30 p.m.

The train was to be moved to the Montreal rail yards later on Monday, she added.

There is no evidence that the piece of rail on the tracks was deliberately set in the path of the train, she said.

It will be up to investigators to determine the cause, she added.

Area farmer aids injured passengers

By Bill Eekhof

Doug Davis had more than 400 unexpected guests arrive on his doorstep early Sunday night.

They were refugees from a VIA Rail train that stood ablaze on the track at the back of his Brighton Township property.

"I've never seen anything like it," Mr. Davis said Monday.

Witnesses described the train as a ball of fire as it went through the town of Brighton.

When Mr. Davis saw the fire, he rushed to the scene. He was stunned by what he saw.

"I have never seen a fire like that. It was not a little fire. The (railroad) cars

were just melted-down wrecks," he said.

After a few moments, passengers began to appear out of the wreckage and the surrounding wooded area.

Mr. Davis said he and his children grabbed flashlights and led groups of people back to his house.

Most were dazed and in shock.

One of the first things Mr. Davis did was to get out his backhoe and clear a makeshift road for emergency crews and evacuation teams to reach the tracks. The area is swampy, wooded and secluded, he said.

Fire officials soon arrived at the scene to extinguish the blaze. In the meantime, many of the

train's 417 passengers were huddled in the Davis home.

It got so crowded in the house that Mr. Davis flipped on the heat in his garage so that the travellers could shelter there.

A lot of them had cut hands from smashing windows in their bid to escape. Many also complained about burned feet.

Mr. Davis said his wife and children attended to the passengers' needs as best they could.

"We handed out clothes, coffee, hot water, shoes and boots," he said, noting that many passengers also wanted to soak their burned feet in the Davis bathtub.

A bus soon arrived to

transfer the passengers to East Northumberland Secondary School in Brighton. There, they were attended to, and those with more serious injuries were sent to area hospitals.

Several remained at the Davis home.

Mr. Davis said one mother and her young child waited at the home until a family member from Toronto came to pick them up.

Most were gone by 11 p.m.

Mr. Davis downplayed his family's efforts.

"In anything like this, you just do it," he said.

Brighton resident Doug Johnston was sitting in

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