



The three crewmen who were in the caboose were killed.

Action was swift, and that afternoon the local coroner, James Barber, had rounded up a jury at the railway station and proceeded to examine the mangled remains, and piece together the story of the disaster. In that day, the only communication between the rear of the train and the engineer was by means of a bell rope, a rather primitive affair, strung along the outside of the cars from the caboose to the engine. Unfortunately, every time the freight stopped to shunt off or take on new cars, this line had to be gathered and re-strung.

Since the conductor could use a visual 'go ahead' when leaving the Georgetown station, he had not bothered to restring the line. In the end, the brakemen were found guilty of abandoning their posts. Because of the cold, the two brakemen and the conductor had huddled around a small stove in the caboose. Apparently, company regulations required at least one of the brakemen to be stationed atop the cars whenever the train was in motion, and had one of them been where they were supposed to, they could have applied brakes in time to have possibly stopped the cars.

The jury recommended that the company should do more to enforce its rules and that all trains should reduce their speed when crossing the Credit River Bridge—a rule that I believe, is still followed



An early postcard showing the iron bridge.

to this day.

Forward 146 years to 2002 when several cars of a freight train left the track, in probably the same area as the 1864 accident. This time a piece of a rail car broke away from another car, and was dangling, causing a wheel of that car to travel up it allowing it to ride askew the track, eventually derailing the train.

In 1864, five men were required to man the freight and it had the familiar red caboose we all remember. In 2002, it only took two men. The end of the train was just another railcar, and for communication, they no longer rely on a bell rope strung from the back to the front of the train!

For some years now, the single track across that bridge has been a deterrent to increasing the traffic

on this rail line, and in 2009 the provincial and federal governments allocated \$30 million to widen the line. For the past several months, work has been ongoing to enlarge the width of the pillars so they will accommodate a double track with the provision to allow yet a third track in later years.

It has been interesting to watch the work in progress. While we are losing the beauty of the original stone work, it has at least been enlarged with cement poured into forms to enlarge the pillars and they have been stamped with templates to replicate stonework. Roadways have been created to the bottom of the valley to accommodate machinery and cement trucks, much as they probably were back in the mid 1850s, except that it would have been just men and wagons pulled by horses who were traveling that same piece of valley. After the original construction, the river valley was scarce of trees and large vegetative growth, just as it will be once again for many years. But time will erase the scars and the river valley will go back to supporting the deer, coyotes and wildlife that have always called it home.

So next time when you cross over this unique structure, take a minute to remember the men of the past and give thanks for the expertise of those pioneer builders who worked to make this not only a piece of local and Canadian history, but such a safe way to travel.




An 1864 C.W. Jeffrey's depiction of the derailment in which it was erroneously stated 13 people were killed. Three crewmen died when the caboose and another car plunged off the bridge. (Right) The Iron Bridge in 1907.


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