Larry Paul shared a link.
July 29, 2017

The “Crash at Crush”
I have read lots of short stories people have written over the years about the “Crash at Crush” from the ones on line to the ones that have appeared in “Trains Magazine.” I must say I am a bit peeved at how they never give you the full story and keep perpetuating the same misconceptions due to the lack of research. They just keep rewriting each others stories over and over with their own little spin to it.

Some of the more glaring errors I have found:

William George Crush was fired and rehired, he was never fired and rehired.

No one ever called him Willie, he was known as Bill.

He was purported to have drilled two water wells on the site. The water was brought in from Waco and placed on a side track. There were four water cars with eight tubs, a capacity of 16,000 gallons of free, pure artisan well water, with several tons of ice. This water was conveyed up a hill an eighth of a mile by a two-inch iron pipe, and every five or six feet was a faucet with a chained tin cup.

The crowd reached 50,000. The crowd only reached 30,000 at best.

One even wrote that a lynch mob was looking for Crush after the event due to all the injuries. That was not true as well.

I could go on and on but I am sure you get the jest of what I am saying.

I spent two years researching the event and here is my story I wrote back in 1995 in preparation for the centennial anniversary of the event and I added a couple of other things as well later also here is the link to his memorial I helped with on Findagrave.com

https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi...&

“Crash at Crush”
The Real and Whole Story
By Larry R. Paul
On September 15th 1996, the centennial anniversary of perhaps one of the most spectacular and surly the most infamous railroad
promotional stunts ever conceived in the annals of railroad history has quietly slipped by with nobody willing or eager to do a re-enactment.

William George Crush, general passenger agent of Texas, for the Missouri-Kansas & Texas Railway (the Katy Line) on September 15, 1896, staged a head-on collision of two locomotives at full throttle.

THE RAILROAD BOOM

From 1853 to 1905, more than 270 railroad companies catapulted Texas to boasting more miles of track than any other state, a distinction it still owns.

The first north-south rail route across the United States was opened on March 10, 1873, when the Houston & Texas Central reached Denison, Texas from the south, where the Missouri, Kansas & Texas newly built from the north, joined rails.

On November 25, 1881 the second Trans-Continental Railroad route was opened when the Southern Pacific-building east from California and the Texas & Pacific building west from East Texas met at Sierra Blanca, opening a southern route across the continent.

Thomas Peirce, president of the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railway drove a silver spike at the Pecos River crossing on January 12, 1883 to complete the Sunset Route, the first continuous rail line between New Orleans and Los Angeles.

By 1888 Fort Worth residents completed the Fort Worth & Denver City Railway, it connected with a line that stretched to Denver Colorado.

By the mid 1890's more than 8,000 miles of rail lines operated by hundreds of railroad companies, spider-webbed the state of Texas, which spurred fierce competition prompting railroads to go to great length to promote their roads.
HOW IT GOT STARTED
In early July William George Crush met with Frank Rouse, then president of the M. K. & T. and Delbert Jones, who was a very influential member of the board of directors. They held an informal meeting in a St. Louis club. The context of the meeting was to discuss ways of increasing freight business, and the promotion of the Katy Flyer, a new fast train with first class service to St. Louis and Chicago without having to change trains.
Crush seizing the moment, pitched his plan to promote the railroad, explaining the same stunt had been pulled off by the Columbus and Hocking Valley Railroad earlier that summer near Lancaster, Ohio and they drew a crowd of 40,000 people.
Crush went on to explain that he could draw a crowd of at least more than half that many and that he would stake his reputation on it.
At first the management was not too receptive to the idea but they knew crush was on first name terms with at least two-dozen newspaper editors, traveled in a good society circle and was a good friend of John Ringling, of Ringling Bros. Circus fame, so they agreed to take his scheme to the board.
After obtaining approval from the Katy's board of directors (who thought it was a grand scheme) Crush went to work, working around the clock, he had his big chance, the plan must not fail or he would be faced with total humiliation.
GENERATING THE INTEREST
On Wednesday August 5, 1896 Crush announced his plan to the newspapers, every paper along the line from Chicago to Galveston ran the story and was eager for more, it was big news. Crush was interviewed about his plan. Articles on every aspect of the subject appeared almost daily for a month before the big event. Crush touted it as a scientific experiment to establish cause and
effect. The collision was to be viewed by technical engineers and the results would be thoroughly examined to ascertain the weak points of the present construction of locomotives.

Thousands of large lithographed posters with vivid red illustrations representing two trains just before they collide and the scene just after the crash has occurred, were printed and posted all over Missouri, Kansas, Texas and Indian Territory (Oklahoma). It was billed as, the sight of a lifetime, larger than the circus, greater than the state fair, and a pleasant excursion in comfortable cars.

Soon after the news of the big event spread, Crush began getting letters from all over the country, a few at first then they came in by the hundreds it was more than three stenographers could answer. Some of these letters came from points as far west as the Pacific shore. Some were from eastern states but the majority were from Texas. One from the passenger department of a Colorado railroad, which asks for all the details of his plan as they were thinking of giving a similar exhibition. Another from an engineer who was willing for a good round sum to run one of the locomotives within fifty yards of the wreck and then taking the chances of breaking himself all to pieces by jumping off.

Several persons made application to ride in the rear cars for the adventure, and notoriety to be derived from it.

SITE SELECTED

After spending two days traveling up and down the line, W.G. Crush, and J.E. Smith, the Waco passenger agent chose a site along the Katy tracks (now Union Pacific) about eleven miles north of Waco, Texas and three and a half miles south of the city of West.

The site selected was at milepost 831, which lay in a pasture where gentle hills rose on three sides of the tracks, to the
north, south and west, creating a natural amphitheater, with natural walls on three sides, and the fourth, that on the east stretching away among level fields of cotton and corn. The track runs almost due north and south, so there is a grade on both sides about 100 feet to the mile, and it was down that grade the two trains rushed to destruction.

THE MACHINES

After picking the location Mr. Crush then traveled to Denison, Texas where the roundhouse and repair shops were located. There he was to meet with C.T. McElvaney and J.W. Petheran, superintendents of motive power, to select the locomotives.

Two American Type 4-4-0, thirty-five and a half-ton engines, manufactured by Grant Locomotive Works in 1869, were chosen. No. 123 and No. 120. The M. K. & T. purchased eleven identical engines of the 4-4-0 wheel arrangement that year. There cereal numbers were 624 and 634, there respectively road numbers were 116 and 126. They had 16x24 inch cylinders: 68 inch driving wheels: weight on drivers of 23 tons: 185 psi. boiler pressure: the boiler had 169, 2-inch tubes: the length of the tubes was 11 foot and 3 inches: the length of the Firebox was 66 inches: the diameter of the boiler shell next to the smoke box was 51 inches: total engine weight 78,000 pounds: The tender tank held 2,500 gallon of water.

Mr. Crush had the locomotives rebuilt, remodeled and all the latest appliances put on them, right down to new seat cushions and new bell rope making them as good for their weight as anything the Katy had in the way of locomotives. They were repainted in an opposing red and green color scheme. No. 123 was renumbered to 999, the tender was painted bright green and trimmed in red, with yellow stripes and numbers. The boiler was enameled in black and the stack was red. The wheels of the engine and tender were red, striped in blue and yellow. The cowcatcher was painted red and green. The cab was green and trimmed in red, black and blue.
It was originally intended by the Katy people to allow the
Denison shops the honor of rebuilding and preparing one of the
locomotives and to have the other done at the Parsons, Kansas
shops, but due to the better facilities at Denison for doing the
work the 120 was ordered to Denison. The old 120 was renumbered
to 1001 and repainted the same colors as 999, but was just the
opposite, the tender was bright red and trimmed in green and on
the tender of each engine was the Katy logo. The bells were
ornamented with various colored ribbons.
The locomotives were to each pull six stock cars, these cars
were not selected due to age but were just picked up as they came
along.
The cattle cars were boarded up and advertising in the form of
huge gaudily painted canvas banners was sold and hung on the side
of the cars. The first car of No. 1001 carried a large add of the
Oriental Hotel in Dallas and one of the cars carried a huge add
of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas. The first car of No. 999 bore
a large advertisement of the State Fair and the rest were
plastered over with show bills of the Ringling Bros. Circus.
Two of the adds were trade outs, the Ringling Bros. Circus and
the Oriental Hotel.
CRUSH, TEXAS
Two weeks before the planed event Mr. A.D. Arbegast general
foreman of the bridge and building department began supervising
the erecting of a large bandstand with three speakers stands,
two telegraph offices, a reporter's stand and thirty privilege
stands to be arranged in Midway style. On the hill a 50x75 foot
Ringling Brothers Circus tent was erected to house a restaurant
that was presided over by Mr. F.E. Miller, Katy's head chef. Mr.
Miller who came down from St. Louis had with him a couple dozen
expert waiters. Sandwiches, hot wienerwurst, sauerkraut, pies,
hot coffee, etc., were furnished at fair prices. At another large tent beer and wine was served. No hard liquor was sold, but consumption was not banned. A 2,100-foot station platform, a wooden jail and outhouses were built. A small V.I.P.'s grandstand was erected opposite the "post" that denoted the spot of the anticipated impact. On a side track, brought in from Waco, were four water cars with eight tubs, a capacity of 16,000 gallons of free, pure artisan well water, with several tons of ice. This water was conveyed up a hill an eighth of a mile by a two-inch galvanized iron pipe, and every five or six feet was a faucet with a chained tin cup.

Leo Wolfson of Dallas was successful in getting the concession for a dozen lemonade stands. While others sold popcorn, ice cream cigars and etc. There was exhibitions of freaks and other "attractions" familiar as sideshows and carnival-type games.

Deane’s Photography, a firm from Waco that was composed of two brothers Martin and Jarvis Deane, had Contracted for exclusive rights to photograph the exhibition. They employed J.L. Bergstrom and set up three cameras on a raised platform 12x18 feet and nine feet high, just 100 feet from the point of impact. Martin Deane was to take his picture a second before the engines were to collide. Bergstom was to snap his picture on impact, and Jervis Deane was to shoot his picture immediately after the crash. There for a sequence would be possible. Two other photographers were also there on the platform, J.W. Rector who came from New York with a Kinetoscope and Louis Crow, who was armed with a new camera which had just been placed on the market, a Kodak.

The Katy board of directors named the temporary city "Crush" in honor of the man who though up the grand stunt.

THE TRAINS ARE READY
Four days before the big event the newly painted locomotives with their string of cars pulled out of the Denison yard with the crew that was selected by Mr. Crush. Collision train No.1 pulled by engine 999, had C.E. Stanton at the throttle with Frank Barns as fireman, Conductor Frank Butts in caboose 34. The brakemen were A.A. Malone and R.B. Phillips. Collision train No. 2 was powered by No.1001 and run by Charles Cain, with S.M. Dickerson doing the firing, Conductor George Tobin in caboose No.15, and was assisted by Brakemen Harry Barber and A.E. McCoy. Agent Crush publicized the route they were to take to the crash site. The No. 1 train went via Fort Worth, while the No. 2 train went via Dallas. Stopping for about an hour in each town for public inspection, and they drew large crowds at every stop. The two trains spent the night in Dallas and Fort Worth before heading on to Crush. When Charley Cain learned he was to run one of the locomotives he sat down and wrote this letter to agent Crush.

Denison, Texas
Sept. 9
Mr. W. G. Crush,
general passenger agent.
Missouri, Kansas, and Texas:
Dear Sir:
In as much as I, one of the engineers to handle an engine at the great prearranged collision at the town named in your honor, I beg to submit you the following: The vocation of a locomotive engineer is an honorable and high calling. More than usual honor is added to the calling by the fact that I have been selected as one of the men to get the trains together under full head of steam: therefore I humbly ask that you provide a safe, sure and speedy pony, equipped and ready at the point where I am to leave the engine, so that I may mount
and ride into the scene in due form becoming and befitting the
dignity of an engineer, for you yourself can readily see how un-
dignified it would appear for me to go plodding along like a
plebeian to the wreck after all is over.
I submit this to your consideration, hoping that you will see
the dignity and gravity of the situation and save me a long walk.
Very respectfully
Charles Cain

TEST RUNS

Three days before the big event the engines and crews were at
the site making test runs. After no less than a dozen test runs,
the timing was worked out in this manner.
On each engine a clamp was placed, against which the throttle
could be opened. In this way the same throttle setting could be
used each time. The throttle was opened to the clamp with the
reverse lever in low and then the engineers would count 16
exhausts, which was four turns of the drivers.
They then set the reverse lever to high, in that way they could
make a mile in one minute and a fraction of a second for an
average speed of more than fifty-eight miles an hour, from a
standing start.
Other problems had to be overcome, such as the link-and-pin
couplers, the pins sometimes jumped out and that broke the train
as the cars uncoupled. To prevent that, each of the pins were
drilled and a key was fitted.
The steam line to the air pump was disconnected so the airbrakes
could not be set by some mishap such as an air hose breaking.
All tools, spare pins and other loose objects were removed from
the engines as an extra safety precaution.
A section of rail was removed from behind each locomotive to
prevent the possibility that one train might jump the tracks and
the other run wild.
Rope barriers were set up 200 hundred feet from the tracks on either side and a half mile long, to keep the crowd out of the designated danger zone.
All rail traffic between Waco and Hillsboro was put on hold from 7am till midnight on the day of the big event, so they could get the special trains in and out.

COLLISION DAY
The morning dawned clear and bright, cool but not cold it was to be an Indian summer day. The crowd began gathering early and by 10am 10,000 people were milling about the grounds. A two-dollar excursion rate was offered from Dallas and Fort Worth. The event itself was free.
The trains began arriving every twelve minutes loaded with spectators. Thirty special trains of two hundred and fifty-four coaches brought visitors from as far away as New York to the crash site.
Due to lack of track space the southbound trains proceeded to Waco and the northbound trains went on to Hillsboro to park. People also came by wagon, buggy, and horseback. By early afternoon 30,000 people were on hand for the event, creating one of the largest cities in Texas, for one day.
Two hundred special constables were on hand to jail the drunks and pickpockets.
The surrounding hills were covered with people standing shoulder to shoulder. Every inch of space was covered it was a sea of human beings, some standing in wagons and others in trees.
The crowd had a splendid opportunity of seeing everything that occurred. The majority of the people were located on the west side of the track, on top of a hill, having a straight view of every thing that happened and no sunshine in their eyes.
Most of the day was taken up with political speeches (for it was an election year), visiting the attraction, riding the machinery, and the arriving of the trains.

Just after 3:00 pm, one of the trains steamed slowly over the course and was cheered by the crowd. Then the other train came down from its berth on a siding and was also loudly cheered. By this time the people were so excited that suddenly a huge wave of human flesh surged in to the danger zone, and were within ten yards of the tracks. The constables were called in to control the crowd. It was with great difficulty that crush and Sheriff John W. Baker and his 200 constables were able to control and induce the people to seek a place of safety. By four o'clock the time scheduled for the event all the special trains had not arrived so a postponement of one hour was inevitable.

THE COLLISION

At 5 o'clock the two trains meet at the point of collision, touched cowcatchers and were photographed. The engineers waved to the crowd and backed away for the grand funnily. Engine No. 1001 with Charles Cain as engineer Frank Barnes as fireman and F. E. Van Gilder conductor, backed south to mile post 832, while engine No. 999 with Charles Stanton in charge of the throttle, S. M. Dickerson as fireman and Tom Webb as conductor, backed north to mile post 830, both collision trains being preceded by wrecking trains.

Crush who was the Grand Marshal, wearing a blue sash and mounted aboard a high spirited white horse gave the signal at ten minutes after five with a wave of his hat. A special telegraph operator forwarded the signal a mile in each direction.

The throttles were shoved open, black smoke bellowed from the stacks steam hissed, moments later the whistles began to scream (for they were also tied open.) Stanton and Barnes stayed with
old 999 for only 500 yards, while Cain and Dickerson thrilled the crowd by staying with old 1001 for a half a mile before they leaped from the locomotive did a barrel roll jumped to there feet and bowed to the crowd.

As the locomotives approached the site there was a succession of explosions from torpedoes, (cartridges that explode under a locomotive’s wheels) that had been placed on the tracks to add to the excitement.

Closer and closer came the reeling and rocking behemoths with whistles shrieking, picking up speed with every turn of the drivers.

When the trains were within a few feet of each other some of the faint-hearted clapped their hands over their ears, closed there eyes and turned away from the awful spectacle. Some women grabbed their children and started in the opposite direction, but the biggest portion of the crowd stood with open eyes and open mouths.

Then all of a sudden there was a dull sickening crash as the huge mass of iron and steel slammed together. The locomotives tear at each other; they began swallowing one another up, each telescoping the other, boxcars began to stack up one on top of the other, then disintegrate, less than a split second later came another ear shattering boom louder than a clap of thunder.

Despite all the safety precautions unfortunately, the intended amusement turned deadly, as the two locomotives collided, at an estimated speed of sixty miles per hour. THE BOILERS ON BOTH LOCOMOTIVES EXPLODED, sending thousands of hunks of hot iron, steel and wood splinters into the air. They began to hail down on the crowd within a radius of 300 yards of the point of collision.

About 100 yards south of the track. The helpless spectators packed like sardines were unable to escape from the hot spinning
bits of metal shrapnel.
The following is an excerpt from The Dallas Morning News of September 17, 1896 by Kenneth Foree.
"The force of the explosion can not be conceived, not conveyed in written or spoken words. Pieces of iron weighing 200 pounds were hurled hundreds of feet in the air. The cap sheaf of the smokestack sailed nearly a quarter of a mile and buried itself in the soil within 15 feet of a screaming shrieking mass of men and women who had seen its flight and were making a mad effort to escape its fall. A pair of heavy trucks, themselves weighing nearly a ton, were lifted nearly a hundred feet, knocking down a telegraph pole as if it had been a reed and tearing down the wires for several hundred yards. A cylinder head with about two feet of the piston rod sailed round and round, at every revolution the broken rod making a whistling noise as it lashed the air.
It passed directly over the photographer's stand for an Un-reckoned instant the heads of all there assembled seemed doomed. To those frightened men this fragment appeared as large as the capitol building.
But they all providentially escaped and the fragment of the wreck landed in a brush heap not four feet from the edge of the platform.
Half of one of the spokes of a driving wheel sizzled and screamed, cutting its way through space with the speed of a shell and dropped so close to Rector, the Kentoscope man, who was on the platform that he has not got done shivering yet. Great length of heavy brake chains wound and coiled and stretched for all the world like a serpent, the rattling and clanking making the resemblance horribly real.
It was one of those sections that struck poor Darnell on the
head and almost cut it in two.
Nor was this all. The big pieces could be seen and heard and a nimble man could get out of their way. But it seemed as if the heavens had opened and emitted millions of indistinguishable pieces of iron and steel no bigger than a man's hand which beat around the platform and around the few there assembled as a hail storm beats against the side of a house. They had the speed of a bullet, and being larger in size were more destructive. How the people nearby escaped is not short of miraculous.
One poor fellow, Deane of Waco, one of the photographers, was struck in the eye by one of the missiles being so great that he was knocked prostrate on the floor. Several thousand of those splinters, both of wood and metal fell in the brush and upon the platform.
The work of annihilation was almost complete. Of the two engines and nine of the twelve cars not a vestige remained except a smoking pile from which the steam escaped in thin jets of pristine purity. The debris was so locked and interlocked that when the wrecking crew set their cranes to work and attempted to move the mass it fell into a million particles. Of all that was left nothing was worth the saving. Only a heap of scrap iron and kindling wood was what the railroad hauled away in the moonlit night".

THE RUSH FOR SOUVENIRS
The immense crowd stunned and dazed from the shock began to recover realizing the danger was over, by the thousands rushed over to the smoking heap of ruins, breaking down the ropes used for a barricade, climbing over bushes and many instances running over those who were slow or had stumbled. For many who had traveled a great distance to attend the spectacle, they were not to be denied their souvenirs. Mr. J.W. Work of Dallas was seen
to emerge from the crowd holding a small piece of wood which he joyously exclaimed was the second piece gathered from the wreck. Who got the first could not be ascertained, but happy indeed was he who secured the first one. Most found the debris too hot, and fingers were burned.

J.W. Rector the photographer from New York with a Kinetograph recorded the disaster, reportedly the first newsreel recorded on film in Texas.

So well had McElvaney made his calculations that the collision occurred within ten feet of the spot selected for it, mile post 831, with a sign "Point of Collision" and the contact was just a shade to the south of the pole.

As soon as the dense smoke had cleared away two cars of the northbound train were seen standing erect on the track, and one of the southbound, but the two locomotives and nine cars were piled up in a mass not fifty yards in length.

Of the twelve stock cars three of one train and four of the other was converted into kindling wood.

Three cars pulled by engine 1001 running north, remained on the track apparently unhurt the front one being pushed into the ruins. Two cars of 999 running south remained on the tracks the front car standing within 30 feet of the end of the car of the Northbound.

After about an hour as soon as the excitement had subsided and the crowd could be dispersed the two wrecking trains and crews went to work. This attracted the people’s attention as much as any other feature of the day's events. In three hours the last vestige of scrap iron and wood had been cleared away and the track was open for business.

THE RACE TO LEAVE BEGINS
By 5:33 p.m. the extensively advertised and much-talked of pre-arranged head-end collision was a thing of the past. No trains put in an appearance, however, until 6:30, by which time the crowds were packed along each side of the track for two miles, making it almost impossible for the cars to pass through. The first train left the grounds at 7 o' clock, and from that time until nearly 11 o' clock the crowds packed and jammed each other, men and women alike fighting for places on departing trains. Confusion was rampant. No one knew which train to take, and train officials seemed unable to give any intelligence. Thousands were hauled into Waco and dumped, and for several hours sought in vain some information as to how to get away, and many finally gave up in despair and went to hotels for the night. The crowd was immense, the confusion most pronounced, and the result was a tired, home-sick and hungry crowd. Many had not tasted food since early morning, as the lunch stands at the grounds soon gave out. They were weary and weather-washed, the cars were packed to suffocation, and while holiday wrecking was great, it was hardly greater than the mass of humanity who presented a totally wrecked appearance as they stood in the moonlight alongside of the track and impatiently waited an opportunity to catch a train for anywhere. Notwithstanding the great crowd the grounds were well policed and few fights were resultant, through drunks were constantly on exhibition. The order observed was excellent. There was only one incident which threatened to terminate seriously and that ended peaceably. A black man struck a young white boy over the head and then ran like a deer. Half a hundred men were after him. He was finally caught after one of the officers in pursuit had fired his pistol into the air. The firing of this shot attracted a great deal of attention, and for a time it was thought that some one
had been killed, when the nature of the affair was explained quite was at once restored.

THE KILLED AND INJURED

Two people were killed, Ernest Darnell, 19 year old son of Colonel Darnell of Bremond who was hit in the head by a flying brake chain, and Dewitt Barnes of Hewitt who was standing between his wife and another woman, was struck and killed by a flying fragment. J.C. Dean the photographer, was struck in the right eye. Roy Kendrick of Waco, 14 years old, right leg perforated just about the ankle by an iron bolt. Mrs. J.L. Overstreet of Jarrell, Williamson county, was struck on the head just above the right ear by a fragment of a boiler and rendered unconscious. Theodore Millenberger a farmer who resided in the vicinity of Crush, was setting in a tree becomes dizzy from the excitement falls out of the tree, breaks his left leg, dislocated his right hip and sustained an ugly scalp wound. Claude Alvey, a Waco fireman, hit in the chest by a flying piece of timber. Four other people suffered cuts, burns and bruises.

Dr. Wederwich who was a spectator in the crowd pushed his way to the photographer's platform and began to treat Jarvis Deane and the others who was injured. It was found that a stay bolt (with the nut still on it) had embedded itself in Deane's eyeball. As one of the special trains was returning home after pulling out of Abbott, a man named John Morrison, of Ferris, stepped on the platform of a passenger coach, intending to go into the caboose. In attempting to cross from one platform to another, he missed his footing and was thrown underneath the wheels of the caboose and was fatally injured.

The following is a statement from crush that ran in the Dallas Morning News on Thursday September 17, 1896.

STATEMENT FROM CRUSH
Regrets That Any Person Should Have Been Injured

General Passenger Agent W.G. Crush returned from Waco last night. He had this to say.

"I regret more than any person that anybody should have been injured as a result of the pre-arranged collision. I certainly exerted all the resources at my command to keep the people beyond the danger line, but it was absolutely impossible. I begged, entreated, threatened and commanded them to seek a distances of safety, and they paid no more attention to me or to the other of the constables of whom there were 200, than if we had nothing to do with the affair. As soon as I discovered that several people had been hurt, I immediately took charge of the arrangements for their comfort and everything has been done for them that medical skill can accomplish. The death of young Darnell and the serious injury of the others is the only cloud upon the success of the plan. Barring a few minor details everything was executed as intended, and I believe we had the largest crowd that ever assembled in this state. Of course no one could have foreseen that the explosion of the boilers would occur. Every possible precaution had been taken to guard against such a contingency, and we believed that it was almost impossible, but in this as in many other cases plans miscarried to our very great regret."

Mr. Crush further stated that he did not see the collision, and only reached the scene several minutes after it had happened in time however, to see a great pile of wreckage.

THE HUMOR

In a nutshell, the collision was superb, awe-inspiring in the extreme and grand in sublimity, it had its sad feature, however there were some amusing situations also.

The crowd became impressed with the idea that they should gather around the track almost within twenty feet of the place where the
two trains were to collide, and it was with difficulty that they were made to get behind the rope that marked the danger zone. Even this distance proved to be not far enough in some cases, but if the crowd had remained where they wanted to the mortality would have been something terrific.

It is safe to predict that at least 5,000 of the people present never saw the collision at all. In their desire to see it they had gathered close and did not realize the danger until the two trains had almost came together. Then they realized there hazardous position and took to their heels. This fact occasioned many to have their backs to the scene when the engines ran together, and they did not see it, though they were instantly apprised of what had happened by the explosion.

There were many amusing situations that developed there, however, along with the varied scenes. One of the spectators went down in the arms of a full-blown jug early in the day, and picking himself out a soft position on the ground about twenty-five yards from the spot where the collision was to occur, deposited himself to slumber and he did. The sun beat down on him all the afternoon, but he slumbered on. He was still asleep when the engines smashed together. The noise awoke him instantly, and he quickly assumed a sitting position. As his eyes opened the air was filled with flying debris that fell around him like hail, but with that luck that only favors the chosen, he escaped without a scratch. He quickly realized the situation, however, and rising, he wandered rather rapidly away and was still walking when last seen. He was a little late in starting, but he lost no time after he did start, and he did not tarry to tell anybody good-bye.

Another amusing incident was attendant upon the flight of rather a fat Dutchman who happened, as he thought to be too near the scene of conflict. He stood his ground noble until the engines
were some twenty feet apart, but his courage failed him then. He lowered his standard and took flight. He was well underway when the explosion took place. He could not stop to look around, but he knew something had happened, and with an energy born of desperation he took a reef in his sails and fairly flew. He had not run thirty yards before a barbed wire fence crossed his path, but the fence was the only thing that suffered. He was stopped for a minute only, then he and a panel of the fence rolled into the roadway together. Untangling himself he continued his flight with a zeal worthy of any cause.

Col. Jim Miller who was worked to buy a wooden cigar, which had been painted, and puffed at it trying to get a light until he was black and blue in the face, also asked a railroad man why it was that the engineer was not killed, as he was evidently on the engine that was in the wreck as the whistle was blowing almost continually. The railroad man explained that the whistle was tied down, and then Mr. Miller took a sneak.

John Chenneville claimed to have been the first officer on the grounds to locate the wreck and said that he saw it first.

Alderman Norton remarked that the wreck was not any worse than a council meeting. J.E. Johnson tried his best to open negotiations with the wrecking crew to furnish them incandescent lights.

Andy MacDonald, who had taken a day off to witness the wreck, was standing about 150 yards away when the explosion took place. He instantly turned and lit out for Waco, some fifteen miles distance, and hollowed at every jump not to shoot. After a spurt of three miles he quieted down and returned to the scene, through his hair was considerably whitened.

Pat Smith of the International and Great Northern road look on with wonderment, and said that he did not see how the Katy could let two trains run together that way, that it was rank
carelessness, and the dispatcher could have ordered one of them sidetracked. Matters were explained to Pat and he began to realize that he was just beginning to live and getting onto what the world was doing.

Jim Davis who would have made an expert baseball player, judging from the way he tried to avoid catching about half a boiler that came his way when the explosion occurred. Jim cut up some fine antics—trying to get out of the way of the boiler, and when it finally hit the ground it was at least three hundred yards from Jim, although he thought it was coming directly at him all the time.

Charley Stowe went forth to conquer the universe and take Kodak pictures, but he became so excited that he not only forgot to take any pictures but lost his Kodak.

Mr. Guy Collette, who was also on hand, stationed himself about half a mile from the scene of the collision with a spyglass. He had them focused on the wreck just as the two engines met, and as his glass was a very strong one; they brought the wreck very near at hand. As the engines collided and the explosion took place, Mr. Collette said that he saw one of the cars totter, and forgetting for an instant that he was looking through a powerful Field glass, he made a rapid flank movement to get out of the way of the falling car, and only removed the glasses in time to keep his heart from jumping out of his mouth.

There was dozens of other amusing incidents attendant upon the explosion, which bears out the statement that this world, is made up of many phases of life.

MORE THAN BARGAINED FOR

An Irishman named Hanrahan who was the foreman at the Denison Texas roundhouse that re-worked the two locomotives warned that the boilers would surely burst, but safety inspectors assured
agent Crush that they would not.
Despite rumor, he didn't lose his job. Crush himself handled the
claims in what was termed "a most fair and quick manner." Deane
received $10,000 for his lost eye and a lifetime pass to ride the
M. K. & T.

In-fact in 1906 Crush took part in another spectacle, a 12-day race that matched the Katy and
Frisco lines against the Missouri Pacific and Cotton Belt lines. Where the fastest team would win
a U.S. mail contract between Dallas and St. Louis. The race ended in a tie, so the railroads
shared the contract.

The event accomplished its purpose. The news of the "Crash at Crush" overnight gained
headlines around the world. For years afterward the story was regularly repeated by those who
was there to those who didn't get to see the big event. This gave the M. K. & T. publicity that
was impossible to buy. Thousands of others regretted their failure to attend. Jess Kimball of
Groesbeck, Texas grumbled for years because his father refused to let him attend the spectacle.

Scott Joplin the Texas ragtime master published a piano solo called The Great Crush Collision
March. It was the third piece of music he published. It was the first Joplin composition that
contained any element of ragtime. It contains several oddities, one the march is dedicated to the
Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad. For another although published in Temple, it wasn't done
by Joplin's customary publisher. The music is lively, with no trace of sorrow for the victims,
although published in a period known for its dirges. Could Crush have commissioned the piece
before the Great Train Wreck?

The following is a verbatim article that ran in the Dallas Morning News on Friday September 18,
1896.

Found a Cracker Box.
Hillsboro, Hill Co., Tex. Sept. 17. Billy McBride of this city found a cracker box under the
platform at Crush Tuesday evening, after the collision. It contained 150 sticks of what he and
others thought to be dynamite. It was seen by others from here. He told Mr. Crush and others of the Katy about it. It was fifteen or sixteen feet from where the collision occurred. He was after a piece of wreckage to carry away when he saw a tow sack under the platform and pulling the sack out saw the box of dynamite under it.

Could Crush have used this dynamite on the locomotives? When the wrecking crews returned to the Denison yard they reported to a newspaper of that city that only one of the boilers exploded, that of locomotive No. 999. The wrecking crews also recovered a watch that had been placed in locomotive No. 1001 by Walter & Heffner of Hillsboro, who were the watch inspectors for the Katy. It was unharmed and in perfect condition.

What lessons they learned from a safety and scientific standpoint that would insure the protection of life and property for the future is unclear. Some of the railroad men present were convinced of one thing, that perhaps these regal and majestic machines that had defied destruction for so long were not to be made sport of for a holiday crowd seeking excitement.

On September 2, 1976, a state historical marker was dedicated just north of the Tours Road intersection, at I-35, on the right side of the north bound service road, that commemorates the incident, which happened about a half mile east of the marker.

Some Eyewitnesses Accounts From the Dallas Morning News
J.W. Rector, the Kinetoscope man who came from New York to be present at the collision, said: "I have seen a great many things in my life, and have some pretty close calls, but that knocks anything cold that I ever saw before. I am not going around looking for any more. I was on the photographer's stand. There is not money enough in the country to get me on one again. I saw the collision on the Hocking Valley road, the first of the kind ever given in this country, and that was not a marker to this one. I doubt if there ever was more complete destruction in the world than that of those two engines. I went over and looked at the wreck after it was all over and it did not seem to me as if a piece of one of the engines as big as a hat remained. I was on the platform when the rain of iron and steel began falling and I want to say that it is a wonder that every man there was not killed. I saw the piece which tore out Deane's eye and though it was really no
larger than a dime. it looked as big as a six-story house to me. A great big chunk of iron started over in my direction and I made up my mind that it was all day with me and got down on my knees behind the machine. The chunk passed within four feet of me and dropped over the edge of the platform. It appeared to be as big as the whole state of Texas. If there had been any way for me to have got off the platform I would have jumped, but I could not get off. I just had to stay and make the best of it. No more collision in mine, if you please."

Col. Alex E. Sweet, the humorist, watched the scene from afar off, but he saw enough to satisfy him for the balance of his natural life. Col. Sweet is an ex-confederate soldier, and therefore not unused to stirring things. Said he: "I would suggest to the enterprising caterers to the public fancy that the next thing in order ought to be a prearranged and carefully scheduled meeting of a waterspout and a tornado. I am sure, from what I saw at crush, that such a conjunction would draw a tremendous crowd, and whet the jade appetites of people who crave excitement. As to the collision at Crush, I can only say that I am glad I am alive. When I saw the cap of the smokestack gently loitering in the atmosphere above me, I heard it say, 'Come, Alex: come, you are too good for this earth,' but I told it the earth was not too good for me, and it grew offended and passed on. The hero of the gallant stand at Norris' bridge and the conqueror of three untamed broncos was not to die through the instrumentality of a heroic fate. After the boiler iron had passed by another aerial visitor in the shape of a solid chunk, weighing about twenty pounds, sighted me and made signals by whistling that it desired to meet me. As I was not feeling well, and not thoroughly sure of the character and reputation of the whistler, I have learned something."

G.M. Deane of Dallas, one of the photographers, whose brother lost his eye, was among those on the platform. He said: "There is not money enough in the country to get me that close to another collision. I have been experimenting with electricity and explosive chemicals for a number of years, but nothing in all my experience approached what I went through during the two minutes immediately following the collision. I was too busy at work to pay much attention to what was going on at the time, but when I stop and look back at the dangerous position in which all of us upon that stand was in I tremble. The whistling of the fragments of the iron and steel as they swept by me made an impression I will never forget."
WILLIAM GEORGE CRUSH

A native of Kentucky, born in 1865, began his illustrious railroad career in Louisville, at the age of 23, when he went to work for the auditor's office of the Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville Railroad. Then within two years was transferred to Chicago.

He joined the Missouri, Kansas, & Texas Railway in 1893 as general passenger agent for Texas, and made his home at Denison, then the general office and headquarters of the railroad. When headquarters were moved in 1895, to the Market street station in Dallas he moved with them. He was working out of that station when he staged the head-end collision and the train race for the mail contract.

By 1914 Mr. Crush was promoted to passenger agent for all Katy lines, and five years later became passenger traffic manager of the railroad.

Crush was instrumental in persuading the railroad to erect the famous Highland Park Station in 1925, as a business booster, explaining that many travelers dreaded climbing the Union Terminal steps. There for saving many Dallas travelers a "tiring climb up the steps."

On Oct. 1, 1930 he was promoted to assistant to the vice-president in charge of traffic. A few years later he became special representative for the Katy in charge of the Highland Park passenger station.

After 51 years of railroading (forty-six of those years with the M. K. & T.) in 1940 at the age of 74 he retired from the railroad. After retirement he went to the station daily to meet the passenger trains.

He passed away Monday, April 12, 1943 at his home at 3816 Miramar
St. Highland Park, Texas, he was interred April 15th at Calvary Hill Cemetery, (a Catholic cemetery) 3225 Lombardy Lane Dallas, Texas in section F, lot 11.

He was survived by one brother Ollie Crush, of Colorado, three sisters, Mrs. Frank Harping, Mrs. Lily Smith and Mrs. B. Spading all of Kentucky, and his wife Katherine R. (Katy).

OTHER STAGED HEAD-ON COLLISIONS

Between Two Steam Powered Locomotives

There were many other staged head-on collisions. The first one was held by the Columbus, Hocking Valley & Toledo Railway on May 30th 1896 at Buckeye Park (now Camp Coonpath) which is located near Lancaster, Ohio.

Two sixteen year old, 40 ton locomotives named after the promoters of the event, A.L. Streeter and W.H. Fisher. The fated locomotives were to each pull three empty coal cars and a caboose.

At 4:15 pm. a cannon rocket was fired. The W.H. Fisher run by P.J. Clancy and fired by H.E. Arnold, was backed south 3,300 feet from the collision point. The A. L. Streeter operated by J. D. Loomis and William Booth fireman, was backed to the north 3,000 feet. The advantage was given to the latter engine due to the track being down grade from the south.

A second rocket was fired, after getting the locomotives started the throttle was shoved open, the fire boxes was dumped and the pressure relief valves was tied open, they leaped from the cabs. After the two engines collided the front part of both locomotives was forced straight up into the air, the cabs was crushed to the tracks. The first car of the Streeter train was forced under the tank of the tender, the second and third cars stayed on the track but were badly damaged. The first car of the Fisher train was completely demolished and the second was stacked on top of the
third car. The cabooses were slightly damaged.
The two locomotives collided about 200 feet north of the designated point of impact, at an estimated speed of 50 mile per hour.
One injury resulted from the collision Mr. T.C. Peck who was the Chief Clerk of General Passenger Agent W.H. Fisher. He suffered a compound fracture of the right leg below the knee, a puncture wound about an inch deep on the right hip and a bruise on the left leg just below the knee. He was standing about three or four feet from the rope that was used as a barricade, which had been erected 300 feet from the tracks.
The other staged collision was done as a movie stunt. Two ex Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad Co. narrow gauge locomotives was used. Dynamite was placed on the engines to aid the effect, but the timing was off and it was prematurely detonated.
The Man Who Wrecked 146 Locomotives
The Story of "Head-On Joe" Connolly
From the book by Jim Reisdorff.
"The Man Who Wrecked 146 Locomotives: The Story of 'Head-On' Joe Connolly."
Between 1896 and 1932, Iowa native Joseph S. Connolly staged 73 head-on train wrecks before large thrill-seeking audiences at state fairs and other public events nationwide. Connolly, known as "Head-On Joe," boasted that he deliberately destroyed 146 old steam locomotives during these collisions and never had anyone injured in the process. This book looks at both the career of this professional engine wrecker and the techniques used in staging a train wreck for public entertainment. Dramatic head-on locomotive collisions staged by other promoters are also detailed using 40 rare illustrations and informative text. It's a look at a largely forgotten but still fascinating part of railroad.
It was a train wreck of an event
Reprinted with permission.
In 1906, on a mile-long stretch of track where the L.A. Coliseum now stands, promoters hurtled two giant locomotives toward each other. As the engineers leaped to safety, the climactic moment came.

Even for Los Angeles, the accident scene drew an unusually large number of gawkers — and the accident hadn't even happened yet.

The 6,000 or so ticket-buyers who gathered that September day in 1906 had come to see a staged head-on collision between two locomotives on a mile-long stretch of track laid down in Agricultural Park near downtown.

The Times gave the meeting of Engine Nos. 13 and 23, late of the Salt Lake Railroad, the tongue-in-cheek buildup of a great boxing match or horse race.

"Trained to the minute, the iron gladiators will each be fed a light breakfast of 21 tons of soft coal and 3,500 gallons of water this morning," the newspaper reported.

The only passengers on the two leviathans would be the engineers who promised that, before they leaped free, they would have the locomotives rumbling along at 40 mph at least.

"The affair promises to be the most spectacular event ever shown in the West," The Times said.

The curious sport of train-crashing, though new to Los Angeles, had been around for several years, says Jim Reisdorff, author of the book "The Man Who Wrecked 146 Locomotives: The Story of 'Head-On' Joe Connolly."

From 1896 to 1932, Connolly staged 73 train wrecks at state fairs and other galas, mostly in the Midwest.

"I guess the train wrecks appealed to the more primitive side of man — the thrill of seeing something destroyed," Reisdorff said. "Nowadays people go to demolition derbies."

He also noted that "the railroads played a much bigger part in everyday life back then. Seeing something so familiar getting mangled was fascinating."

Connolly inspired imitators around the nation, including the two promoters of the Los Angeles event: baseball owner James Morley and former Pomona football coach Walter Hempel.

The prospect of the smash-up in Los Angeles produced a festive atmosphere.

"The big park was aglow with color," The Times said. "Gaily dressed ladies, accompanied by their escorts, thronged the grandstand and throughout the big field hundreds of vehicles, from the violent-hued automobile down to the tally-ho of subdued elegance, were scattered."

The engines, meanwhile, were warming up by "parading up and down the mile of track and
meeting in the center. They would approach each other at a fair speed and the hearts of the crowd would rise in their throats, expecting the crash. Then slowing down at the last moment they would stop."
The emcee was Frank "Megaphone" Cook, the city's most famous public announcer, "without whose presence no public amusement can be a success," The Times said. Megaphone mounted a white charger and paraded up and down in front of the restless, fenced-off crowd.
"A note of warning," he intoned in his dramatic speaking style. "After the lo-co-mo-tive collision, the crowd will please keep within bounds for 10 minutes as there is the dire possibility of a second mishap."
The proceedings were held up at one point when the two engineers approached the promoters and demanded an extra $350, evidently figuring they had caught the promoters "at a time when they could not secure other engineers," The Times said. No such luck. Two reserve crewmen were swiftly summoned and the holdouts were told to hit the road. Finally, co-promoter Hempel ran out near the tracks, a white flag in one hand, a revolver in the other. He fired the gun six times to get everyone's attention and "a deathlike stillness settled over the thousands of spectators. A dog scurrying across the field seemed to feel the tension in the air and cowered to the ground," The Times said. Then Hempel gave the signal for the showdown, dropping the white flag as he scurried "pell-mell and hatless for the fringe of the crowd where safety lay," about 700 feet from the tracks. The locomotives, "with their steam pipes yelling shrilly … rushed angrily toward each other, disputing the right of way," as the engineers leaped to safety. The climactic moment came. And passed. "There was no deafening crash," The Times said. "There was a dull, muffled 'chunk'… They reared slightly, settled down and stopped. Dense white clouds of steam enveloped them." The engines were "a mass of debris," but neither derailed. A boy climbed up on the engine of one of the "impotent monsters," as The Times called them, and drew laughs by ringing a warning bell. "When the momentary hope that the boilers might explode and do something worthwhile passed,
one said to himself, 'Is that all?" The Times concluded.
Such was the end of train-wrecking in Los Angeles.
Not even the talents of Megaphone Cook could prevent the show from being labeled a flop.
years later, Agricultural Park became the home of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. But some things never change. Now football players crash into one another there.
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