

## Four Trains 2.4 Miles from Conneaut



By Kathy  
Warnes

The New York Central Railroad Conneaut accident brought Lakeville Police Officer Ernest Fedor face to face with both death and life.

Lakeville Patrolman Ernest Fedor told a Conneaut News-Herald reporter that he worked with several others to remove Mr. John Pettit from the wreckage, but despite 45 minutes of frantic effort, John Pettit died

John Pettit was one of the 22 people who died in the violent New York Central Railroad crash on Friday evening, March 27, 1953, when two New York Central passenger trains crashed into a derailed freight train. At approximately 10:02 p.m. the lives of 22 people ended in violent crashes and over 150 people were confronted with the injuries they sustained when two freight trains and two New York central passenger trains, the Southwest Limited and Mohawk 2933, encountered each other on a remote set of four parallel tracks 2.4 miles outside of Conneaut, Ohio. The New York Central had named this four-track section of the line running from New York to Chicago "The Water Level Route" because its nearly level terrain allowed fast passenger trains to travel between the two cities. The New York Central Railroad heavily advertised this main line from New York City that snaked along the Hudson River, the Mohawk River, and the flat lands south of Lakes Ontario and Erie.

### Several Steel Pipes and Derailments

At two minutes after ten o'clock in the evening of Friday March 27, 1953, an east bound freight train clattered across the Ohio Pennsylvania border about 2.4 miles outside of Conneaut, Ohio. As the freight train lurched along, at a number (some accounts say one, others several) of steel pipes thundered off

a gondola car, thudding onto the adjoining tracks and bending a rail on one of the inner passenger train tracks.



The freight train vanished over the horizon, without the conductor realizing that the steel pipes were scattered across the four tracks and the rails on the passenger track had been bent and dislocated.

What happened next would transform the lives of over 400 railroad passengers and the train crews as well as stretching

the resources of community emergency organizations including local hospitals, the Conneaut, Ohio, Chapter of the American Red Cross, and the lives of people in Conneaut and across the country.

Details of the railroad accident 2.4 miles outside of Conneaut vary, depending on the newspaper, word of mouth accounts and other documents and retellings. The New York Central Railroad and the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission report summed up the events of Friday Evening March 27, 1953, from their perspective in a report of their investigation in a meeting held in Erie, Pa, from April 1-3, 1953. The opening paragraph of the report described the accident as “Occurring on the New York Central Railroad in Pennsylvania 2.4 miles east of Conneaut, Ohio, and 1,861 feet east of the Ohio, Pennsylvania line on March 27, 1953.”

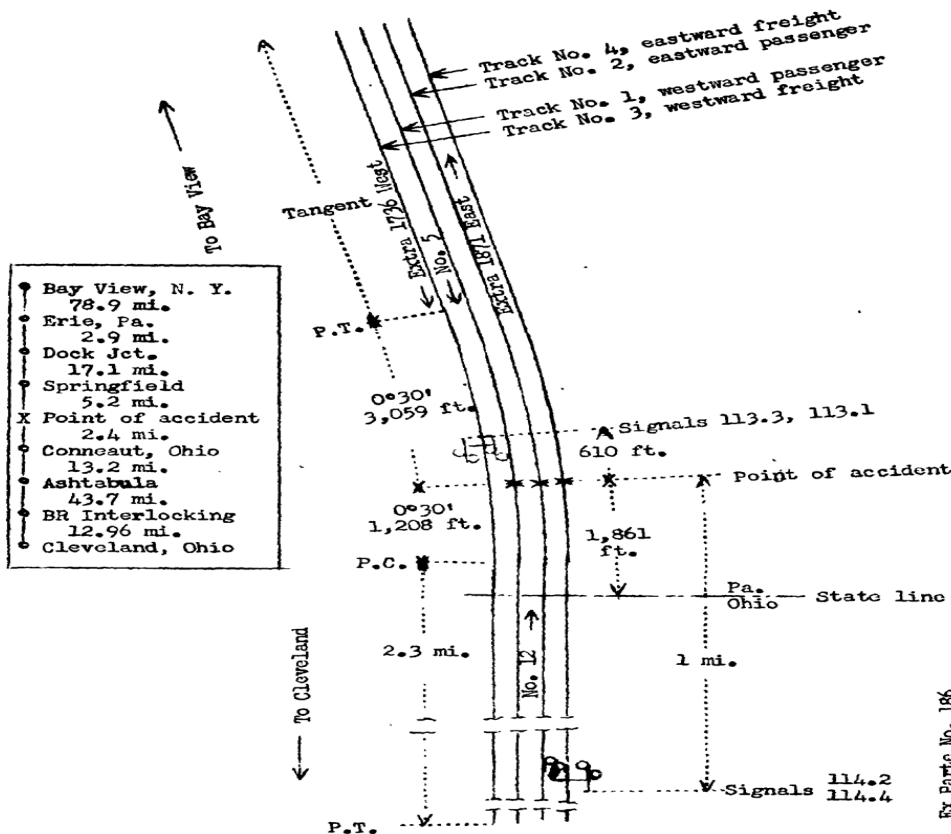
The Pennsylvania Utilities Commission and the New York Central Railroad described the accident as “caused by damaged track as a result of Improperly secured, lading falling from a car.” The derailed passenger train collided with a moving freight train, between derailed passenger equipment and another passenger train on an adjacent track. Sixteen passengers died in the accident as well as one express messenger, two train service employees, and two other employees. Thirty passengers, one Pullman Company employee, one person carried under contract, one train service employee and eight other employees were injured.

The companies submitted the report on April 25, 1953, and decided on May 25, 1953. People submitting and signing the report were:

H. H. McLean and O. J. Graham for the New York Central Railroad Company. Howard A. Weaver for the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission. George Flack of Marsh, Spaeder, Bauer and Spaeder for Jones and Laughlin Steel Company. Harry Grey for Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. L. E. Gerard for Order of Railway Conductors. E. F. Kruse for Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. L. J. Maison., O. A. Rhodes., Don S. Tryon, and J. K. Williams, labor representatives.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>2</sup>

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Ex Parte No. 186  
 New York Central Railroad  
 Near Conneaut, Ohio  
 March 27, 1953

The Conneaut News-Herald account of the accident differs slightly from the official report.

Conneaut News Herald

Monday, March 30, 1953

#### 400 Workmen Clear Wreckage of Three-Way Pileup East of City

Trains are moving over the New York Central again today, passing the wreckage of Friday's disastrous three train pile up, the worst this area has witnessed in the century. The final death toll is 21. The injured number about 64. All of the dead have been identified except one – a woman about 30 years old. Erie County Coroner Warren Wood said this morning.

According to Coroner Wood, the woman was about five feet three inches tall and probably weighed about 125 pounds. She had brown hair and eyes and wore a blue woolen dress. It is believed she was a mother. No relatives had claimed her body. The Coroner said she apparently died of abdominal injuries. She had no identity on her person.

The Pennsylvania Utility Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission will launch an investigation this week into the crash, but it is expected to be only routine. The explanation of the crash as given by New York Central officials reveals that four trains were involved in the crash.

An eastbound freight on the south track was carrying long lengths of 18-inch pipe, when several of those pipe lengths rolled off a gondola car, the north rail of the westbound high-speed track was damaged, causing the Mohawk, the westbound passenger train to derail, and throwing its cars into the paths of a westbound freight and an eastbound passenger train. The eastbound freight was not damaged and it continued eastward without knowing that the other three trains had wrecked.

The two north tracks of the line were put into service at 5 p.m. Sunday. About 400 men were in the repair crews which began to work about two hours after the accident happened at 10 p.m. Friday.

New York Central trains both east and westbound were routed over the Nickel Plate through Conneaut. Ninety-three trains were handled, it was reported this morning.

Some of the trains made the switch in Conneaut but most of the changeover from the rail companies was made at Madison or at Besemer near Erie, Pa. The last NYC train to be handled by the NKP was at 7 p.m. Sunday.

The chief dispatcher to Erie said repair of the other two tracks would be

resumed when the crews are rested. He was not sure when traffic would be back to normal. The trains are now traveling at restricted speeds past the wreckage, the dispatcher said.

A New York Central official described the accident as one in a million because it involved three trains passing within two minutes of each other on separate tracks.

Some of the wreckage was brought into Conneaut Saturday. Much of it still lies on the banks of the four-track roadbed.

In addition to the crews, NYC officials, the company's police force at the scene Sunday, three there were also Railway Express and Post Office personnel. <sup>3</sup>

#### Accident Site and Scenes



Barbara Hamilton in her "From the Porch Swing" Column- Part II of June 26, 2019, in the Gazette newspapers described her efforts to reach the accident scene in her friend's Subaru Outback. She wrote they traveled "the remote, lonely, desolate overgrown path leading to the tracks behind the Lake Erie Correctional Facility, down Thompson Road just off route 20. "They reached the tracks, and then realized they weren't looking in the right place because there were only two tracks and no curve." She realized they were on the opposite side of the tracks, separated by thick woods from where they needed to be.

They turned around traveled almost back into Conneaut and turned down Tyler Road, which led them across Dorman and Old Main and into Thompson Road from a different direction. This area is part of the 88-acre Conneaut Wildlife Refuge bordered by Thompson Road and leading to the tracks. This road is remote, featuring just an occasion house. After passing several tracks, Barbara and her friend saw the road sloping down, angling into a dark overgrown underpass. To her surprise, a train burst out of the underpass seeming to float on top of the bushes and undergrowth. They decided it was too dark for pictures and time to go home.

Barbara advised her readers that finding the site on Google Maps was the best way to see it and if they wanted to explore it in person to "contact the railroad or police and get an escort to the actual site on the other side of the tracks."<sup>4</sup>

## Accident Aftermath

### Spreading the News and Surveying the Site

According to the newspaper accounts and testimonies from people first arriving at the scene, one of the conductors from the passenger trains ran two miles to a State-Line restaurant to call for help

On that Friday evening, Mrs. Alice Hill Mackey, a Conneaut housewife who was one of the first to reach the scene, said it was “horrible, just horrible.” “Wreckage was scattered for half a mile,” she said. “It was dark and raining and hard to see. You could hear the moan's and cries of the injured. "Nobody seemed to know' what happened. It seemed like one car went right through the engine.”

On that Friday evening Conneaut Police Chief J.A. Pounds told reporters that “A good many persons have been injured" in the wreck. Railroad cars were scattered all along the border.”

On that Friday evening, March 27, 1953, Tony Talarico, one of the early eye-witnesses to the wreckage said, "We've counted 25 bodies already.”<sup>5</sup>

In her two consecutive columns about the wreck, Barbara Hamilton also reported the stories of four of the onlookers who flocked to the accident scene. Eighteen-year-old Gary Tabor of Williamsfield and his cousin stopped at Conneaut on the way to Niagara Falls, New York, while transporting a load of lumber to be used on the tunnel at Niagara Falls. Hearing about the train accident, they decided to visit the site. They reached the remote location, parked at the side of the road, and trekked the long road to the accident. They were astounded to see the destroyed cars and twisted metal and iron.

Barbara also heard from 79-year-old Norm Kovacs, who was 13 in March 1953. Norm and his father Stephen Kovacs and his cousin Jimmy traveled to the site the day after the accident. Norm recalled being surprised that the authorities had not put up caution tapes to mark the accident site and keep onlookers away from the rescue operation. He said, “You could not imagine the destruction. The train cars were all tipped over. I was flabbergasted.”<sup>6</sup>

The remoteness of the accident site did not keep sightseers by the thousands, ( some would say, morbidly curious sightseers), from flocking to the site of the New York Central Railroad accident during the weekend of March 27-29, 1953. According to a story in The Conneaut News-Herald, even the morbidly curious were unprepared for the magnitude of the destruction.

After they had trudged through ankle deep mud and swampy woods to reach the twisted and scattered wreckage, the curious couldn't believe their eyes. They stared at the mangled remains of once gleaming steel passenger cars, majestic locomotives, and rugged freight cars that lay scattered and piled across the landscape like a child's toy blocks.

As the onlookers listened to the sounds of stream cranes and the voices of cleanup crews inching the broken metal remnants of once proud and speedy passenger trains and heavy-duty freight trains off the tracks. The onlookers listened to the sounds of the cranes and clean-up crews removing and replacing the twisted rails and broken ties and they talked about the miracle that the death toll hadn't reached more than the official count of 21.

On Sunday afternoon, March 29, 1953, the influx of onlookers reached its peak. Parked cars and other vehicles lined both sides of Routes 20 and 3 for nearly two miles near the accident scene. The cars featured license plates from Cleveland, Youngstown, and other places in Ohio. License plates hailing from distant states gleamed in the sunshine.

State police and sheriff's deputies directed bumper-to-bumper traffic moving in three lanes most of the day. The police closed all side roads near the wreck to all but official vehicles, but people parked on road shoulders and in farmyards. Determined sightseers climbed or broke down fences and crossed fields to reach the wreck site, about a mile north of Route 3 and just a few hundred yards of the Ohio line.

The sightseers and their vehicles prevented emergency equipment from getting through to the wreck to remove the injured and dead and allow cleanup equipment to reach the site.<sup>7</sup>

### Rescuing and Repairing

Along with national, state, and regional journalists and photographers, Conneaut photographer "Blick," Bob Blickensderfer, recorded the New York Central Railroad wreck of March 27, 1953. His photographs contribute to the historical record and demonstrate its magnitude and impact on the lives of the passengers, crew, and rescuers, and clean-up crews from the railroad and surrounding communities.

# Robert Blickensderfer Photos of the New York Central Railroad Conneaut Wreck, March 27, 1953





Other Newspaper Coverage<sup>8</sup>

The Saturday morning March 29, 1953, Cleveland Plain Dealer covered the catastrophic train wreck with slight variations and understandably focusing on the Cleveland area residents who died.

Miss Edna Marie Ryan, 27, a nurse at the Veteran's Hospital in Cleveland was devoting her life to helping paralyzed war veterans. She perished in the wreck.

Other Cleveland area casualties were James A. Lewis, a New York Central conductor from Cleveland; James H. Schuh, 41, of Avon Lake; Vaughan A. White, 25, a Western Reserve student; and Donald C. Aston, 24, from Lakewood.

The Plain Dealer also listed the remaining fatalities and featured two pages of pictures and comments from some of the first people to reach the wreck site.<sup>9</sup>

Herbert L. Emory of Toledo and John R. Pettit and James R. Whalen, both of Ashtabula, were other Ohio victims.

Victims from other states included: Charles A. Benson, New York Central conductor from Buffalo, New York; L.H. Bush from Hazel Park, Michigan; A.E. Chadick, from New Orleans, Louisiana; Emma Grace Colburn, 16, from Westfield, New York; Mrs. Joseph Cutri, Erie, Pennsylvania; Dan Dickerson, 38, Washington, Illinois; Tom Henderson, Erie,

Pennsylvania; Russell F. Hill, Chicago, Illinois; Etta Llewellyn 75, Auburn ,Nebraska; Mrs. Ethel Quinn, Erie, Pennsylvania; Frank Such, Buffalo, New York; and Mrs. Bess Wallace, 49, Westfield, New York. She is the mother of Miss Colburn.

Ashtabula General Hospital, Brown Memorial Hospital of Conneaut, and St. Vincent's and Hamot Hospitals of Erie, Pennsylvania treated the injured from the wreck. Brown Memorial Hospital of Conneaut treated three of the injured passengers.<sup>10</sup>



The Adirondack Daily Enterprise

*Tragic Death Of Wreck Victim Is Described By Rescue Worker CONNEAUT, O. {&}*— A truck driver today gave this description of what he saw in a tilted, squashed coach of the wrecked Southwestern Limited.

"Here was this man up there, wedged under the crushed roof —"One of his legs was draped over a seat. We were trying to find the other leg so we could figure how to get him out. He was alive and they told me a doctor had given him morphine.

gauge and clothing were tossed about inside in a terrible mess, he said. They worked by floodlights. Some men brought in a welding torch. "This man was groaning and said: 'Oh. God. hurry up, can't you do something for me?'

"Finally they got the torch up there, and I stood by with a fire extinguisher at the time," he said, "but they cut two seats loose and pulled them away. Somebody wet some pillow cases and covered the man with them.

"A man came to the window. I said, 'Are you a doctor?' He said. 'No, a priest.' He climbed in and gave the man last rites.

"Pretty soon a doctor arrived. A State Trooper had gotten the man's wallet and was trying to find his blood type. "The doctor went up, felt the man's pulse, and said, 'Don't bother boys.

"That kind of stopped us all. We were with that guy. He was taking it pretty

good."

Another survivor said, "We were just riding along, and then I felt a bump and the way next thing I knew I was laying on the floor and my whole left side felt numb. Just as I was going down I saw my bag, which was filled with machinery, fly off the rack and go soaring about 10 feet up. It just missed a woman.

"Some of the people hit the backs of the seats so hard that a lot of the seats were all lopsided. But everything was very quiet. It's odd, but instead of saying much everybody started looking for their luggage."

### More Conneaut People and Places Respond

The Conneaut News-Herald of Monday, March 30, 1953, reported that The Red Cross in Conneaut today hoped that public awareness of its work in disaster roles would help push its fund campaign to the \$7,570 quota for Conneaut and Lakeville.

At noontime today, nearly \$4,500 had been contributed to the drive which ends Tuesday. Examples of Red Cross work today were reported in connection with Friday night's NYC train disaster just east of the city and village.

Members of the Conneaut Canteen were alerted for action Friday night and



Saturday to prepare and serve food to those working at the scene of the train wreck.

The first group taking coffee and sandwiches arrived at the State Line Road NYC crossing at 1 a.m. but were not permitted to

go further at that time. They set up a canteen and served those coming back from the rescue activities.

These members were in the first canteen group:

Mrs. Helen Kaski. Her husband Andrew worked for the Nickel Plate Railroad.

They are buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Conneaut.

Mrs. Mildred Blood. Her husband Roland worked for the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad, the Buffalo & Cleveland Division. They are buried in East Conneaut Cemetery.

Mrs. Clara Crombie. She was married to Ralph Howard Crombie. Both were pharmacists. They are buried in Glenwood Cemetery.

Mrs., Laura Coutts. Her husband Alexander Coutts was a Hulett operator on the P & C Docks. They are buried in Glenwood Cemetery.

Mrs. Elsie Streeper. Her husband Austin Streeper worked on the Nickel Plate Railroad. Austin, his first wife Margaret and second wife Elsie are buried in Glenwood Cemetery.

Mrs. Heima Veith. Her husband Harvey Veith worked at American Fork & Hoe.

Mrs. Walter Kellogg

Mrs. Catherine Heinemann was married to George William Heinemann. He worked at P&C Dock. They are buried in Greenlawn Cemetery, North Kingsville.

Mrs. Vivian Laplace. She was married to William LaPlace who worked for the Pittsburgh Steamship Company as a sailor. They are buried in Newport Cemetery, Newport Pennsylvania.

Members making up the second group and working throughout Saturday, March 28, 1953, included:

Mrs. R.J. Hughes

Mrs. Ida Ross. Her husband Glenn Ross was a Conneaut Fireman. They are buried in Glenwood Cemetery.

Mrs. Nell Hayes. She was married to George Hayes who was a brakeman on the Nickel Plate Railroad. They are buried in East Conneaut Cemetery

Mrs. Helen Kaski. Her husband Andrew worked on the Nickel Plate Railroad. They are buried in St. Joseph Cemetery.

Mrs. Florence Whipple. Her husband Andrew Jackson Whipple worked for the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad. They are buried in Glenwood Cemetery.

Mrs. Katherine Sabo. Her husband Andrew R. Sabo worked for the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad. They are buried in Glenwood Cemetery.

Mrs. Lydia Hackenburg. Her husband Dean worked for the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad. They are buried in East Conneaut Cemetery.

Mrs. Bessie Daggett. Her husband Edwin George Daggett worked for the Pittsburgh & Conneaut Dock. They are buried in Glenwood Cemetery,

Mrs. Bertha White with Mr. R.G. White assisting. R.G. White worked in the Sheet Metal Industry.

Canteens from Ashtabula and Geneva relieved the Conneaut group Saturday afternoon and remained to complete the service.

The Red Cross County Chapter House in Ashtabula was open Friday night and Saturday and Sunday all day. At least 100 telegrams and hundreds of calls and reports were made and received at the Chapter House during the weekend.<sup>11</sup>

### Fatalities and Injuries

#### Two New York Central Conductors

James A. Lewis, 9916 St. Clair Avenue NE, Cleveland. A New York Central System Conductor.

Charles A. Benson. 226 Geary Street, Buffalo, New York. New York Central System Conductor.

#### Two Fatalities from Ashtabula

10a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life.) <i>Chemical Engineer</i>		10b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY <i>Hooker Elec. Co.</i>		11. BIRTHPLACE (also give State or foreign country) <i>SACKETTS HARBOR, N. Y.</i>		12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? <i>U. S. C.</i>	
13. FATHER'S NAME <i>Roland J. Pettit</i>				14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME <i>Viola Newberry</i>			
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (Yes, no or) (If yes, complete reverse side of certificate)		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. <i>078-01-8647</i>		17. INFORMANT'S OWN SIGNATURE AND ADDRESS <i>E. Prusikas 2607 Buffalo Rd. Erie Pa.</i>			
18. CAUSE OF DEATH Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c)  *This does not mean the mode of dying, such as heart failure, asthma, etc. It means the disease, injury, or complication which caused death.		18. MEDICAL CERTIFICATION I. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH* (a) <i>Fractured neck, crushed chest</i> ANTECEDENT CAUSES <i>multiple fractures and severe lacerations</i> Morbidity conditions, if any, DUE TO (b) DUE TO (c) II OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS Conditions contributing to the death but not related to the disease or condition causing death. <i>801X</i>				19. INTERVAL Between ONSET and DEATH	
19a. DATE OF OPERATION		19b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION				20. AUTOPSY? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
21a. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE <i>Accident</i>		21b. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.) <i>N.Y.C.P.R.</i>		21c. (CITY, TOWN AND TOWNSHIP) (COUNTY) (STATE) <i>Springfield Sub. Erie Pa.</i>			
21d. TIME (Month) (Day) (Year) Hour OF INJURY <i>3-27-53</i> m. E.S.T.		21e. INJURY OCCURRED While at <input type="checkbox"/> at Work <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		21f. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR? <i>N.Y.C.P.R. Train Collision</i>			
22. I hereby certify that a view (an inquest) was held upon the body of the above named deceased on <i>March 27</i> ..... 19 <i>53</i> .. and that death occurred at <i>10.30 P.M.</i> ...m., E.S.T., from the causes and on the date stated above.							
23a. SIGNATURE OF CORONER <i>Darwin M. Wood</i>				23b. ADDRESS <i>139 West 21st Erie Pa.</i>		23c. DATE SIGNED <i>3-29-53</i>	
24a. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL OF REMAINS (Specify)		24b. DATE <i>3-29-53</i>		24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY <i>Ashtabula, Ashtabula, Ohio</i>		24d. LOCATION (Town, township and county) (State)	
DATE REC'D BY LOCAL REG. <i>3-29-53</i>		REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE <i>Everett C. Hull</i>		25. SIGNATURE OF FUNERAL DIRECTOR AND ADDRESS <i>E. Prusikas 2607 Buffalo Rd. Erie Pa.</i>			

Chemical Engineer John R. Pettit, 33, from Ashtabula, worked in Niagara Falls, New York at Hooker Electric Chemical Company, in the role of Assistant Superintendent. He was traveling home to Ashtabula when the trains collided on Friday evening. He died early

Saturday morning, but official confirmation of his death did not come until

Saturday afternoon.

Lakeville Patrolman Ernest Fedor told a Conneaut News-Herald reporter that he worked with several others to remove Mr. Pettit from the wreckage, but despite 45 minutes of frantic effort, John Pettit died. His wife Dorothea, daughter Penny, and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. R.J. Pettit of Sackett's Harbor, New York, survived him. Ducro Funeral Home of Ashtabula conducted his funeral services and his family sent his body back to Sackett's Harbor for services and burial. He is buried in Lakeside Cemetery in Sackett's Harbor, New York.

James A. Whalen, 57, of Ashtabula.

James Whalen worked for the Railway Express Company as a messenger and was on the job when the trains crashed with the impact destroying his express car. Workers removed his body from the wreckage about 3 a.m. Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>. His wife Anna Ingles Whalen, eight children, six grandchildren and other family members survive him. Ducro Funeral Home conducted his services and he is buried in Edgewood Cemetery.

On that Friday evening, March 27, 1953, Lakeville police officer Ernest Fedor found himself racing death alongside other volunteers to free the body of 33-year-old John Pettit of Ashtabula from the twisted wreckage of the New York

3. NAME OF DECEASED a. (First) James b. (Middle) R. c. (Last) Whalen			4. DATE OF DEATH March 27 1953		
5. SEX Male	6. COLOR or RACE White	7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Specify) Married	8. DATE OF BIRTH Jan 2 1896	9. AGE (in yrs. last birthday) Months Days 57	10. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) RR Express Co
10a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) RR Express Co		10b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY RR Express Co	11. BIRTHPLACE (also give State or foreign country) Wooster Mass	12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? USA	
13. FATHER'S NAME Peter Whalen			14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Bessie Early		
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (Yes, No) (If yes, complete reverse side of certificate) No		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER 714 05 5707	17. INFORMANT'S OWN SIGNATURE James W Whalen ADDRESS Ashtabula		
18. CAUSE OF DEATH Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c) *This does not mean the mode of dying, such as heart failure, asphyxia, etc. It means the disease, injury, or complication which caused death.			MEDICAL CERTIFICATION I. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH* (a) Multiple Fractures Crushed chest and internal injuries 800X DUE TO (b) DUE TO (c) II OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS Conditions contributing to the death but not related to the disease or condition causing death.		
19a. DATE OF OPERATION			19b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION		
21a. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE (Specify) Accident		21b. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.) Shawangville Sub Erie Pa		21c. (CITY, TOWN AND TOWNSHIP) (COUNTY) (STATE) Erie Pa Pa	
21d. TIME (Month) (Day) (Year) Hour J-27-53 m. E.S.T.		21e. INJURY OCCURRED While at Work <input type="checkbox"/> Not While at Work <input type="checkbox"/>		21f. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR? N.Y.C.P.R. Train Collision	
22. I hereby certify that a view (an inquest) was held upon the body of the above named deceased on March 27, 1953, and that death occurred at 10:30 P.M., E.S.T., from the causes and on the date stated above.					
23a. SIGNATURE OF CORONER Harvey M. Wood			23b. ADDRESS 139 West 31st Erie Pa		23c. DATE SIGNED 3-28-53
24a. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL		24b. DATE		24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY	
24d. LOCATION (Town, township and county) (State)					

Central's Number 5, the Mohawk Train. John Pettit was on his way home to Ashtabula from his office in Niagara Falls, New York.

Gather Mail

In her "From the Front Porch Swing" Gazette Newspaper column of Wednesday June 26, 2019, writer Barbara Hamilton featured a photograph of James Roy Whalen that his daughter Ida Owens donated. The last surviving

child of James Roy Whalen, Ida Owens said that she had never visited the accident site. When Barbara Hamilton asked her if the New York Central had compensated her mother, now a single parent with eight children to raise, for his loss, Ida said "Very little and not enough."

Until the crash, the mail had been the responsibility of Ashtabula resident James Roy Whalen, 57, whose workplace was the sealed Railway Express Car, provided by the Railway Express Company. The crashing trains tore the Railway Express Car apart. About 3 a.m. Saturday morning, railroad and



rescue workers removed Roy Whalen's body from the wreckage of the Railway Express Car.

In addition to the crews, NYC officials, and the company's police force at the scene Sunday, there were also Railway Express and Post Office personnel. <sup>12</sup>

## Tales of Two Lucky Dogs

Lakeville Patrolman Ernest Fedor and the Dog

Two Dog Stories in the Train Crashes Have Happy Endings

Lakeville Police Patrolman Ernest Fedor's weekend of March 27, 1953, began tragically on Friday, March 27, 1953, with the wreck of three trains, and tragedy continued to unfold the entire weekend. But on the next day, Saturday March 28, 1953, a glimmer of light wound its way through the dark clouds like a glimmering arrow of hope.

Two baggage car passengers, a large tan boxer and a black and tan dachshund, survived the carnage and made their way to Conneaut.

The large tan boxer from Massachusetts was headed for Cincinnati, but he took a side trip to Conneaut. Calvin Swartz found the large tan boxer at his home



on Marshall Street in Conneaut. The dog had scratches around his neck and legs, probably acquired during his two- and one-half journey from the scene of the wreck.

Saturday, Calvin Swartz called the large tan boxer's owner, Warren North of Wilmington, Massachusetts. Mr. North explained he was shipping the dog to Cincinnati by rail while he was preparing to leave by auto for Cincinnati, traveling via Washington D.C,

As soon as Mr. North arrives in Cincinnati, where he is moving to live, the dog will be shipped from Conneaut. The dog was to have stayed in a veterinarian's kennel in Cincinnati until his master arrived.

In the crash, the large boxer had escaped his crate. It had been insured for \$500. Mr. Swartz reports that the aged boxer is particular about his food and is an especial fancier of hamburger.

The two- and one-half year-old dachshund rode in the baggage car on Train No. 5 traveling west when the crash occurred. His master, Victor Moeneh, hurried to Conneaut Saturday when he heard of the crash. He found out that a "man wearing a badge" had picked up his dog Siegmunda. As soon as he arrived in Conneaut, Mr. Moeneh bought ads in the News-Herald and other area newspapers and on WICA Ashtabula which later became WREO in Ashtabula. He also advertised for Siegmunda on station WICU, in Erie, Pennsylvania.

A friend of the "man wearing a badge" heard the WICU message. Lakeville Policemen Ernest Fedor, 965 Center Road, turned out to be the "man wearing a badge". He had seen a boy hugging the dachshund at the disaster scene and he told the boy that he would take the dog to a veterinarian at Ashtabula.

Siegmunda and Mr. Moeneh were reunited.

This time Lakeville policeman Ernest Fedor's efforts saved a life.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Authors Note. There are discrepancies between the newspaper and official accounts of the New York Central accident. I have recorded the exact figures and facts as reported in each document and referenced them so the reader can see the understandable confusion swirling around the accident and its aftermath. Personally, I believe the official accounts tended to downplay the human impact of the accident and the mater-of-fact official investigations and reports.

2

<sup>3</sup> Conneaut News-Herald, Monday, March 30, 1953.

<sup>4</sup> Freak Accident Near Conneaut Caused 1953 Triple Train Crash= Part II. "From the Front Porch Swing" by Barbara Hamilton. Gazette Newspapers, Wednesday June 26, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Decatur Daily Democrat, Decatur Indiana, Saturday, March 28, 1953; Cleveland Plain Dealer, Saturday Morning March 28, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Freak Accident Near Conneaut Caused 1953 Triple Train Crash= Part II. "From the Front Porch Swing" by Barbara Hamilton. Gazette Newspapers, Wednesday June 26, 2019

<sup>7</sup> Conneaut News-Herald, Monday, March 30, 1953.

<sup>8</sup> Newspapers all over the United States and internationally, one as far away as Australia, covered the New York Central crash, most with Conneaut datelines. Some sources say the crash was the only one involving three trains simultaneously.

<sup>9</sup> Cleveland Plain Dealer, Saturday Morning, March 28, 1953.

<sup>10</sup> Cleveland Plain Dealer, Saturday Morning, March 28, 1953

<sup>11</sup> Conneaut News-Herald, Monday, March 30, 1953.

<sup>12</sup> Conneaut News-Herald, Monday, March 30, 1953.

Interstate Commerce Commission Report of the Accident Investigation Link

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