

BULLETIN – Train Wreck at Hilliard

(Columbus Evening Dispatch, April 15, 1955)

Twenty freight cars were derailed at Hilliard on an eastbound Pennsylvania Railroad freight train of 90 cars. It could not be learned immediately whether anyone was injured. The pileup occurred shortly afternoon and was just west of the Russell Grain Co.'s office and elevators.

The train was composed largely of refrigerator cars and was headed toward Columbus. One eye witness said a car load of dressed beef was smashed and the carcasses strewn over the area.



The hard way to make hamburger in Hilliard, April 1955. Photo from Terry Wagoner collection

Damage in Hilliard Train Wreck May Run to \$500,000

27 Freight Cars Piled in Heap Broken Axle Blamed for Smashup

(Columbus Evening Dispatch, April 16, 1955)

Damage may run to \$500,000 in the Pennsylvania railroad freight train wreck which smashed 27 cars and tore up 400 feet of track in Hilliard Friday.

R.H. Neisser, Pennsy division operator, set a rock bottom damage estimate at \$150,000 but said, "It may run way more than that."

A railroad official who declined to be quoted by name said the loss could reach the half-million mark.

The accident occurred when overheating caused an axle to break on the 36th car of the 90-car train heading from Chicago to New York with a load of meat and frozen foods.

As the car's wheels dropped between the track, it spread them apart and sent 26 other cars crazily jackknifing into a tumbled pile of junk.

Neisser said one of the cars skidded 150 feet up the track before falling over. The others were left heaped in a small area equal to that of six cars in a normal position.

Also torn up by the wreck were a number of utility poles and power lines. No one was injured. Four wreck trains and work crews labored through the night to clear the two tracks which run through Hilliard. Two of the wreckers came from Columbus, one from Richmond, Ind., and one from Logansport, Ind.

Neisser praised the work of labor crews. Among other things, they had to shovel up heaps of messy animal fat which had spewed from a tanker car.

The other wrecked freight components included 22 refrigerator cars, and four box cars.

A federal meat inspector stood by while as much of the valuable meat cargo as possible was salvaged.

Trains limited to a speed of five miles per hour were to start making use of the tracks in the wreck area by 10 a.m. Saturday. Full service was expected to resume not long afterward.

At least three passenger trains and 15 freights were re-routed around the accident site. But Neisser said the worst delay was only an hour and 38 minutes, thanks to ample detour routes in this area.

The 35 cars ahead of the wrecked units continued into Columbus, where an unloading and re-icing stop had been scheduled. The 28 rear cars were backed up to Piqua and placed on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad line.

Neisser said there was no truth to reports that the freight was exceeding the 45-mile an hour speed limit through Hilliard.

"There would have been more than 27 cars involved in the wreck if he'd been going faster," Neisser said.

Engineer of the train was E.A. Land. The Conductor was W.R. Washburn. Both work out of Logansport.

The crash occurred west of the Wayne-Center Sts. Intersection near the Russell Grain Co. warehouse in Hilliard.

This is just a short distance from the spot where a freight train was wrecked and burned on Jan. 2, 1952. A carload of ammunition was among those burned.

TRAIN WRECKS

(History of the Norwich Township fire Department compiled by Paul Ritzenthaler)

About noon on Friday, April 15, 1955, a train wreck occurred which required the attention of the fire department. As a ninety car freight train was going through town from Chicago to Columbus, an overheated axle on the 36th car broke, causing 27 cars (refrigerator, box and a tanker of animal fat) to be derailed. Twenty-six of the wrecked cars were lying in an area normally taken up by six upright freight cars. Another skidded 150 feet and stopped at the corner of Wayne and Center Streets. Much of the contents of the wrecked cars were salvaged. Federal Meat Inspectors were soon on the scene, directing operations and taking the frozen meat and produce to refrigerated warehouses. Some of the meat was bought by local people who cut it up and processed it for their freezers. Train service was detoured for twenty hours. No one was injured but damages were expected to be at least \$150,000. The crash tore up more than 400 feet of track, knocked down power and telephone lines along the track and smashed several parked cars.