

The 1917 Ciurea RAIL DISASTER

The Worst Railroad Accident In European History



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You probably haven't heard about the Ciurea rail disaster before, not only because it occurred almost 100 years ago (January 13, 1917) but also because of its location and the tight censorship of the Romanian and Russian authorities.

The Ciurea rail disaster, which involved a very overloaded troop train that ran out of control, leading to a fire that killed many of its victims, was quite similar with another World War I era rail disaster at Saint-Michael-de-Maurienne in France.

The accident occurred at Ciurea, which is located in a remote part of Romania near what is now the border with Belarus, and involved Russian troops and Romanian civilians fleeing a brutal German advance led by Field Marshall August von Mackensen. Romania had entered the war late on the side of the Allies, and after early success was soon overrun by German forces. To escape the enemy, a huge train of 76 cars packed with wounded Russian soldiers, as well as refugees, left the small town of Bârnova, trying to make their way to Ciurea.

The stations in Bârnova and Ciurea were separated by a steep bank about 10 miles long with a 2.5% grade that increased to 6.7% in other areas on the line.

Two locomotives hauling a train of 26 carriages carrying wounded Russian soldiers and refugees departed Bârnova at about 1:00 P.M. Some passengers had to find a spot wherever they could, including on the carriage roofs and between the carriages above the buffers, because the train was so crowded with people fleeing from the advance of the German troops.

As the train began to descend the bank, the engineers discovered, much to their horror I'm sure, that not only were the Westinghouse brakes inoperative but that the other brakes on the train also weren't working properly. This meant the train and its 1,000 or so passengers had become a runaway train and there was no way to stop it.

The braking power of the two engines was insufficient to slow the train, which continued to accelerate even quicker. Despite the efforts of the train crew — who took the emergency measure of putting the locomotive in reverse, and operating the sanding equipment to increase the grip of the locomotives' wheels on the track (adhesion).

It was later determined that passengers had inadvertently broken the connecting pipes between the cars by stepping on them as they crowded onto the train. A soldier also closed the Westinghouse train pipe cock when the train was moving which was why the Westinghouse brakes were inoperative.

To make the situation even worse, a second train was located on the straight line at the foot of the bank at the Ciurea station. In order to avoid a collision with that train, the runaway train was switched to the right into the loop at high speed.

The momentum of the high speed switch forced the cars of the runaway train to derail as soon as it entered the Ciurea Station. The destruction was on a huge scale and the noise must have been deafening; only 2 of the 26 carriages remained on the tracks. The destroyed carriages were quickly engulfed by flames and soon burned down to a pile of twisted ironwork before the trapped, horrified passengers could escape or be rescued.

The final death toll possibly exceeded 1,000 although wartime secrecy, plus the remoteness of the area in which the accident occurred, meant that no precise figure has yet to be determined. Nevertheless, most reports I've seen list at least 600 passengers and crew members being killed.

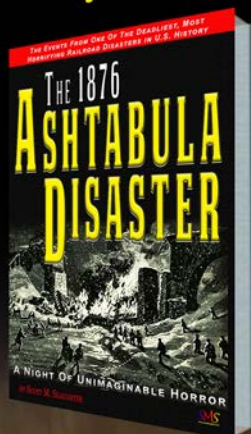
There is, however, no question it was by far one of the worst, if not the worst, railroad accident ever to occur anywhere in Europe.

The Events Recounting One Of The DEADLIEST, MOST HORRIFYING RAILROAD DISASTERS in U.S. History

The holiday season of 1876 should have been a joyous time for the passengers aboard the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad *Pacific Express* train.

However, the moment the train crossed the bridge over the Ashtabula River, the bridge collapsed and all the passenger cars and the trailing locomotive fell about 80 feet before smashing down onto the hard ice of the frozen Ashtabula River.

Many of the 92 passengers and crew who perished were killed during the fall or crushed under falling cars. However dozens of trapped passengers died in a night of unimaginable horror in the out-of-control fires started by the overturned coal-fired stoves and oil lamps.



**A NIGHT OF
UNIMAGINABLE
HORROR**

The 1876 Ashtabula Disaster

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Help Protect Yourself and Others from COVID-19

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Stay 6 feet (2 arm lengths) from other people.



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And Wear a Mask



Be sure it covers your nose and mouth to help protect others.
You could be infected and not have symptoms.

cdc.gov/coronavirus