

From "The Charlotte Observer", December 26, 1931:

DEATH RIDES AT DOWD CROSSING

Entire Family of Four Among Victims - Fast Southern Train Strikes Automobile Occupied by Paw Creek and Kendall People - Victims Almost Home From Holiday Party.

AUTO IS CARRIED TWO BLOCKS

Nine persons, including an entire family of four, were instantly killed. One woman died two hours later at the Presbyterian Hospital.

List of Victims

John L. Love, age 42, filling station operator of Paw Creek

T.H. Holton, employee of the Kendall Mills, at Thrift

Mrs. T.H. Holton

Wilbur, aged four, and Maxine, aged two, children of Mr. and Mrs. Holton

Vaughan Holton, mechanic of Paw Creek, brother of T.H. Holton

Dorie Cox, of Paw Creek

Raymond Sharpe, textile worker of Thrift

Miss Loma Cox, of York, SC, a niece of Dorie Cox

Carried Two Blocks

The tragedy, one of the greatest in the city's history, occurred shortly before 1 a.m. when the fast train caught the overloaded coach-sedan at the crossing and continued for nearly two blocks before coming to a halt.

Today's tragedy happened at the same crossing, where on New Year's Day, 1920, five persons were killed when a train crashed into their automobile. This accident occurred at 7 o'clock in the morning.

With the exception of one, they were pinned in the car and their bodies were ____.

When the train was stopped the body of Miss Loma Cox was on the front of the engine. She was still alive and was first to be removed to the hospital. She died about 3 a.m.

Ambulances were summoned and police were notified. Two ambulances of Douglas and Sing responded, and each of these made two trips, carrying the injured to the hospital. Eight were pronounced dead at the hospital by Dr. G.H. Petteway, who was rendering medical assistance to Miss Cox.

While he was making preparations for blood transfusions for Miss Cox, she died. He had already telephoned Hendrix Palmer, chief of the department, for permission to ask for volunteers from among members of the fire department.

Returning From Party

The party was returning from a party at the home of Frank Cox, father of Miss Loma Cox, at York, according to available information from relatives and friends who called at the mortuary. This, however, was indefinite.

The car was moving westward on the Dowd road; the train was northbound, and the automobile drove into the crossing as the thundering locomotive dashed from the cut. Apparently the approach of the train, as evidently indicated by the headlight beams of the engine, was not noticed by the driver. Occupants doubtless failed to hear the train, as the glass windows of the automobile were no doubt raised.

Car Held By Engine

Caught by the engine's pilot, the car was rolled upwards and police officers said that it was held in place just below the headlight and carried for nearly two blocks.

The clothing of the officers was splashed with blood after they had finished their gruesome task of lifting out the bodies.

The force of the impact was so great that shoes of the women were knocked from their feet. These and other pieces of clothing were picked up by the officers. At the station house these, along with a small pink blanket, with blood on one corner, were placed in the keeping of the officer in charge.

Children Heads Crushed

A peculiar twist of fate was shown in the fact that three of the persons had their right wrists and right legs broken. All sustained injuries in the lower parts of their bodies, except the children, whose heads were crushed. The baby's body was mashed almost to pulp.

Identification of the dead was difficult and it was several hours after the wreck before all of the dead were known. A key ring tag in the pocket of Love, bearing the name of John A. Love, route 5, Paw Creek, was the first clue.

Officials of the Kendall mills at Thrift were communicated with by Ben E. Douglas, and in a short time Wilton Todd, manager, and W. F. Riddle, weaving overseer, came to Charlotte and identified all but Vaughan Holton and Miss Loma Cox. Later, I.S. Parker, night weaving overseer at the mill, arrived and completed the identification. Pathetic scenes occurred at the mortuary as relatives arrived to verify their fears. Cries of anguish and sobs of sorrow broke the stillness of early morning as they viewed the dead.

Dead Laid Out

The bodies of five were laid on improvised couches on the floor of two rooms. The two children lay on a wheeled couch. The other bodies were in the operating room. White sheets that covered the bodies were tinted with red at the places where they touched the mangled parts of the bodies.

F.A. Love, of Paw Creek, brother of John L. Love, and Miss Fay Holton, sister of T.H. and Vaughan Holton, were the first relatives to reach the mortuary.

The automobile, according to F.A. Love, belonged to his brother, and from the description given by the police of the man beneath the steering wheel it was thought that Sharpe was driving the car. This had not been definitely established later in the morning.

A.L. Harmon, claim agent for the Southern railway, had no comment to make regarding the tragedy, pending the completion of his investigation. He did not know when this investigation would be finished.

Love, unmarried, is survived by his mother, Mrs. Ruth Ann Love, of Paw Creek; nine brothers, Walter Love, of Newport News, Va., F.A., Arthur, Macon and Melvin Love, of Paw Creek; Clyde Love, a patient at the United States Veterans' hospital at Augusta, Ga.; Avery and Roy Love, of Charlotte, and three sisters, Misses Margaret and Eunice Love of Paw Creek, and Miss Ida Love, of Charlotte.

Sharpe was the son of Albert Sharpe, retired rural carrier of Paw Creek, who is widely known and highly respected in the community.

T.H. Holton and Vaughn Holton were first cousins of Miss Loma Cox, who was also the niece of Dorie Cox.

Funeral services for five Holtons will be conducted tomorrow at 1 p.m. at the Douglas and Sing mortuary. The services will be conducted by Rev. Zeb Caudle, pastor of Thrift Baptist Church.

Arrangements for the funeral of the other four had not been completed this morning.

The Dowd road crossing has in years past been regarded as dangerous and a number of fatalities have occurred there. Mr. Harmon said that today's tragedy is the first since the accident near 12 years ago.

From "The Charlotte News," Sunday, 27 December, 1931:

Tragedy Spurs Move to Abolish Fatal Crossing Here

City May Remove Trap

Death of Nine at Crossing Stirs Leaders

Rites Are Set

As preparations were completed for three funeral services for the nine persons whose lives were snuffed out when their automobile was struck by a Southern railway passenger train at the Down road crossing here, attention of governmental officials was turned last night to the possibility of measures that would prevent the recurrence of such a tragedy.

John F. Boyd, member of the city council, expressed the opinion that the council should immediately consider plans for the elimination of this crossing, which has claimed a number of lives.

See Need for More Care

Need for the maintenance of 24-hour watchman service, at least, was expressed by other municipal officials.

Shock that racked the little rural community of Paw Creek at the first news of the tragic death of its citizens was followed by the hush of a pall of sadness that hung over the community last night.

Friends and relatives, dazed by the fearfulness of the tragic accident, completed plans for the burial rites.....(words lost because of fold in paper)

The nine who were killed when the Birmingham Special, crack Pullman train of the Southern, hit the crowded automobile shortly before 1 A. M. yesterday, are:

John L. Love, 42, filling station operator of Paw Creek; Dorie Cox, 57, of near Paw Creek; Miss Loma Cox, 21, of York, S. C.; Raymond Sharpe, 19, textile worker of Thrift; Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Holton, of Paw Creek, and their two children, Wilbur, aged four, and Maxine, aged two, and Holton's brother, Vaughn Holton, of Paw Creek.

Single Funeral for Five

Funeral services for the five Holtons will be held at 1 P. M. today at the Douglas and Sing mortuary at Elizabeth avenue and Fox street. Rev. Zeb Caudle, pastor of the Thrift Baptist Church, will be in charge of the services. Interment will be made in the Independence Hill Baptist churchyard, near Croft.

At 11 A. M. services will be held at the Paw Creek church for John L. Love, Dorie Cox and Miss Loma Cox. Rev. C. H. Rowan, the pastor, will officiate. Burial will be made in the churchyard.

Rites for Raymond Sharpe will be conducted at the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Sharpe, near Paw Creek, by Rev. Mr. Ervin, pastor of Moore's chapel. Interment will be at the Moore's chapel burying ground.

The accident, which claimed the lives of nine persons, was said to be the greatest single traffic fatality in North Carolina.

City officials, shocked at the tragedy, were wondering what steps might be taken to prevent the possibility of a similar mishap. Councilman Boyd felt that immediate attention should be given to the elimination of the crossing and he said that he for one is in favor of opening negotiations with railway officials for elimination of the crossing.

"I am well acquainted with the officials of the Southern railway and I believe we can do something to do away with the crossing," Mr. Boyd said.

Others Give Views

Mayor Lambeth and Councilman T. T. Allison both felt that at least a 24-hour watchman service should be maintained there. A watchman is on duty at the crossing only during the day. They said they had not given any thought to the question of eliminating the crossing, and Mr. Allison expressed doubt that any such plan could be worked out just now.

Councilman Claude L. Albea said: "I regret the existence of conditions that would result in such a terrible tragedy and I would be anxious to support any measure that would eliminate such conditions anywhere in Charlotte."

J. B. Pridgen, city manager, who was formerly an engineer with the state high commission and handled the transaction that resulted in the opening of West Morehead street with its underpass, declared, "Of course, the matter has not been taken up with the council and no thought has been given to the Dowd road crossing. Some people do not regard this as a dangerous crossing, but I do and always have."

When West Morehead street was opened up and the underpass constructed, the routing of the state highway was changed from the Dowd road, with its crossing, to West Morehead street.

C. D. Isom, city engineer, said that it would be legally impossible to close Dowd road by blocking the crossing without providing some other means of egress and ingress for the adjacent property.

"I should think it would pay the Southern railway big dividends to guard the crossing through each 24 hours," Mr. Isom said.

When the locomotive struck the light coach-car, crowded with its nine occupants, the heavy train continued for nearly two blocks before it was halted. The car was held up on the engine front and eight of the occupants remained inside until the train came to a halt. The body of Miss

Loma Cox was lying on the front of the engine. She alone was alive when the ambulance attendants reached the scene but she died two hours later at the Presbyterian hospital. The other eight were instantly killed.

No Inquest Seen Necessary

Coroner Frank Hovis announced last night that he found no necessity to hold an inquest.

Solicitor John Carpenter, of Gastonia, came to Charlotte yesterday afternoon to make an investigation but he informed The News that he had seen no reason for continued investigation.

A. ----- Harmon, claim agent of the Southern railway, said that he had not received the formal report of the accident from the train crew. It was telegraphed to the general offices at Washington, he said. Milton Clapp, of Atlanta, was the conductor, and C. R. Nesbit, of Greenville, S. C., the engineer, railway officials said.

At the same crossing on New Year's day, 1921, five members of the P. A. Deal family of Newton, returning from a funeral, were killed when their automobile was struck by an engine.

Miss Loma Cox is survived by her father, James Frank Cox, of York, four brothers, Franklin, William, Dale and Hubert Cox, and two sisters, Misses Edith and Elbridge Cox, all of York.

Survivors of Dorie Cox include his widow, five brothers, W. D., D. J., R. B., J. M. and (--) F. Cox, ----- sisters, Mrs. (.....fold in newspaper.....)

.....Creek, and two sisters, Mrs. Sam McCall, of Lakeworth, Fla., and Miss Ruby Sharpe, of Paw Creek.

Love, unmarried, is survived by his mother, Mrs. Ruth Ann Love, of Paw Creek; nine brothers, Walter Love, of Newport News, Va., F. A., Arthur, Macon and Melvin Love, of Paw Creek; Clyde Love, a patient at the United States Veteran's hospital at Augusta, Ga.; Avery and Roy Love, of Charlotte, and three sisters, Misses Margaret and Eunice Love, of Paw Creek, and Miss Ida Love, of Charlotte.

KILLING OF NINE CASTS PALL OVER COMMUNITY

Three Mothers and Wife Stricken at Violent Passing Of Others - Quiet Farm People, Unused to Tragedy, Cast Down by Sudden Tragedy Here

by Rachel Davis, Charlotte News Statt Writer

A black pall of gloom, punctuated by the acute grief of three stricken mothers and a bereaved wife, settled down on Paw Creek and Thrift yesterday, as the dazed communities began to recover from the shock of the sudden wiping out of nine lives yesterday morning at 1 o'clock when the Birmingham special, fast Southern train, hit a loaded Ford sedan at the Down road crossing here.

Loaded with merrymakers returning from a Christmas trip to York, S. C., every occupant of the car met instant death with the exception of Miss Loma Cox, of York, who lived for a few hours at the Presbyterian hospital where she was taken after the crash. Hospital attendants said that Miss Cox talked for a little before she died, but gave no coherent account of what took place. It is doubtful if she was ever fully conscious, they said.

The victims of the frightful tragedy were all neighbors and friends, and with the exception of John Love and Raymond Sharp, were all related. Two brothers, Vaughn Holton and T. Hugh Holton, who were occupants of the death car, were nephews of Dorie Cox, another victim. Miss Loma Cox was a niece of Dora Cox and a cousin of the Holtons. Mrs. T. H. Holton and her two children, Wilbur and Maxine, were also killed.

Against His Inclination

The trip to York seems to have been entirely unpremeditated. John Love, who operated a filling station near the home of the two Holton families and of Cox and a friend of all three men. He was persuaded to take the party to York in his car somewhat against his inclinations, his friends say.

Mr. Love, who was unmarried, was the first of thirteen brothers and sisters to meet death. He lived at the family homestead beyond Paw Creek. His mother, a stately white haired old lady of seventy, took the news of his shocking death extremely hard. "She seemed to fear something was wrong, when he did not come home when we expected him. We did not go to bed, waiting for him," Miss Margaret Love, a sister, said.

"Mother kept insisting that something had happened to him, but we kept telling her she was silly to worry. Except for my father, who died two years ago, we have never known death intimately. We just did not realize that it could happen like that. Just like blowing out a candle."

Reared in Rambling Farmhouse

The Love family have been farming for generations, and the entire flock of thirteen children were reared in the rambling old farmhouse beyond Paw Creek. "John helped Arthur farm until he and another brother started the filling station," the sister said. In spite of the terrific shock the family was composed and quiet, bearing their grief with dignity. Friends and relatives crowded the house. The first news of the tragedy was brought to them by a young brother of Raymond Sharpe, another victim of the wholesale tragedy. The Sharpes are close neighbors. They have a telephone and news of the wreck was telephoned to them. The Loves have no phone.

Raymond Sharpe, nineteen-year-old youth, who appears to have been driving the car that became the death trap, left home about sundown with his father, Albert L. Sharpe, respected farmer and former rural mail carrier, said. The boy was in high spirits and told his family he was going to a dance with John Love. Friends said that he was wearing a necktie that he had received earlier in the day as a Christmas gift. Other Christmas gifts were spread about the room in which the family received the news of his death.

Mrs. Sharpe who has been critically ill for months was prostrated by the death of her son. "I don't know how she is going to stand it. I can hardly stand it myself" (.....fold in paper....) gathered at the Sharpe home to offer sympathy. He was a graduate of the Paw Creek high

school in the class of last June and was considered a splendid basketball player, having been on the Paw Creek team.

An older son of Mr. and Mrs. Sharpe, Robert Sharpe, died suddenly at about the same age several years ago. "He was at camp with the Boy Scouts, and had to have an operation suddenly. He died under the ether before any of us could reach him. That makes this harder for his mother," said Mr. Sharpe.

Sharpe's Mother Sick

The funeral of Raymond Sharpe will be held tomorrow afternoon from his home, in order that his mother can attend. Mrs. Sharpe has been too ill to leave her bed in many weeks, but desires to hear the funeral services for her son.

Tight lipped and grim members of the Holton family contemplated the sudden wiping out of two brothers, a sister-in-law and her two young children, an uncle and a first cousin. "It just doesn't seem possible. I can't believe it," Mr. Holton said. The elder Mr. Holton lives on the Mount Holly road. Vaughn Holton made his home with his father and sister. T. H. Holton lived with his wife and two children at Thrift.

"The two children had such a merry Christmas. The young-uns were just the right size to take a mighty pleasure in Santa Claus," Mr. Holton said.

Prostrated With Grief

Mrs. Dorie Cox was prostrated with grief when she returned from Douglas and Sing's, where she identified her husband. She spent Christmas day with her mother, and did not know any of the events that led up to the disastrous trip to York. The news of the early morning tragedy was brought to her by a brother of Mr. Cox.

Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Cox, parents of the dead girl, Loma Cox, rushed to Paw Creek about 11 o'clock Saturday morning, after receiving a wire that their daughter had been killed. They did not know until their arrival that Mr. Cox's brother and two nephews had also met their death. The girl would have been 20 in January. She was quite popular in Paw Creek and Thrift, where she had lived with her parents until about a year ago when they moved to York. Bringing Loma back to Thrift seems to have been the primary object of the trip to York.

The mother was frantic with grief, and refused to believe that her daughter was really dead, asking pitiful questions of those who had viewed the body as it lay at Douglas and Sing's mortuary.

The entire community was dazed with the magnitude of death list. All four families are widely connected and hundreds of relatives visited the four homes. Cars rolled up and down the roads around the two little towns all day long, as relatives and friends came to condone on the black end of the Christmas season.

The mortuary of Douglas and Sing was crowded all day, as hundreds of friends and relatives viewed the victims of Charlotte's most gruesome Christmas tragedy of years. Touching scenes were enacted as close friends and relatives cried aloud with horror at the broken and distorted remains of those they loved. Sheets over the bodies had to be changed time and again as the

telltale stains of blood seeped through. Up to a late hour Saturday the funeral chapel was crowded with relatives and friends, making funeral arrangements.

One of the incidents that marked the day was the birth of a great nephew to the dead Dorie Cox. The child, son of Mr. and Mrs. B. R. Cox, 606 West Trade street, was born Saturday afternoon at the Presbyterian hospital. Mr. Cox is a nephew of the dead man.