

## James Michael Lost Life Hopping on a Freight Train

It seems that it was quite common in the earlier days of railroads that men and boys would hop on a freight train and catch a ride. Whether this was done just because the challenge was in front of them or because they needed to get to a specific place is not known. Green County was no different than the rest of the country when it came to these daring acts - which didn't always turn out so well.

The headline of the Monroe Evening Times on July 26, 1910 stated that James Michael ran to catch the train, but was found groaning after the train had departed. The article explained that his foot had been cut off by a freight train at Browntown the previous evening. The wheels had run across the leg just above the ankle joint. A few cords remained to hold the leg and foot together.

In those days there was no ambulance to call to rush him off to an emergency room. So the leg and foot were tied up and his brother took him home. Michael was taken to Malone's hospital in Milwaukee the following day where an amputation was performed. He was still delirious when the train that took him to Milwaukee stopped in Monroe.

More information about the accident itself was also shared. Michael tried to board the freight train in charge of Conductor Prideaux, No. 166, as it was leaving Browntown headed east at 7:30 that evening. No one had seen him, but the station agent heard groans after the train departed. The agent found Michael 50 feet east of the depot lying between the main track and the side track with the left foot laying across the rail of the main track. It was believed that the train was moving when Micheal ran to catch it.



This photo of the Browntown depot, taken several decades after James Michael's incident, is from the collection of the late William Miller.

Michael was about 41 years old and unmarried at the time. The paper said that he "has been riding freight trains for years and found diversion in jumping on and off moving trains. He was not in his usual trim at the time of the accident as he had been drinking during the day and evening."

The newspaper of the 27th said that Michael had the leg amputated the previous afternoon. Dr. H. A. Rouse, evidently a local doctor, returned on the evening of the 26th and reported that the patient was doing well. [Dr. Rouse was not listed in the 1910 Monroe City Directory.]

It seems that injury might not have cured Michael of his sense of adventure for jumping onto trains. The headline on Monday, July 24, 1911 stated, "James Michael Killed by Train." He was killed by being run over by a train at Bardswell, a signal station southwest of Janesville, early Sunday morning. He

had left Monroe on Saturday morning with the intention of taking employment with the circus. He then left Darlington later with the first section of the Gollmar Brothers circus, which passed through Monroe between 1:00 and 2:00 Sunday morning headed to Elkhorn. His terribly mutilated body was picked up an hour later by the crew of the second division of the show.

The body was taken to Delavan and Will Michael was notified of the death. Michael was 42 years of age and the body was buried at the Michael cemetery in Cadiz Township. His mother, Jane (Bridges) Michael, survived him along with a sister, Emma Dietz, and two brothers, Charles and George. Unfortunately, Jane would have to bury another son, Charles, the following year. Some of you longtime area residents may remember Dorothy Dietz Kundert, one of our local historians. James Michael was her uncle; she would have been a young girl when these incidents occurred.

All of the articles in the newspaper referred to James Michaels, but his tombstone at Michael Cemetery in Cadiz Township states that his name was James Michael, so I have used that spelling here.