

MARCEAU'S NOTES

"We paused for several minutes in our stroll along the beach to look at the cribwork and abutments of the old railway bridge. Until that moment I hadn't realized that the railway bridge was not always where it is now, though I had vaguely noted that in old pictures of the town, the railway bridge seemed much nearer. Several people had remarked to me that the bridge actually collapsed twice, so the other day when I had a spare moment I looked it up. The railway reached Grand Falls in 1877 and work on this first bridge was completed the following year. It was of course at that time the New Brunswick Railway. The first bridge collapse was in 1896 when part of it washed away with the spring freshet in April. Rebuilding was completed by midsummer and I believe at this time the site chosen was slightly up river with a firmer rock base, though the river at the new site was slightly wider than the one originally chosen.

Four years later the bridge collapsed again." At this point she quotes the following from The story of old N.B. Railways. "On the 21st of June, 1900, the bridge over the St.-John River at Grand Falls fell when the train from Edmundston was crossing. The train crashed into twenty feet of water. The engineer was Walter Matthews; fireman, William McCluskey; brakeman, Gabriel Poitras; Baggage man, Archille Pelletier; and the conductor was Charles Henderson. The locomotive was CPR No. 508. The following account of the accident appeared in the Railway news, June 28th, 1900:

The terrible accident which occurred at Grand Falls, N.B. on Thursday by the giving way of the CPR railway bridge has so far, we are happy to state, been unattended by loss of life, although Hiram I. Smith, traveler for T. McAvity and Sons, Saint John, James McKenna, traveling passenger agent of the CPR and conductor Henderson of the CPR train went through the bridge were very seriously injured.

There were six passengers in the car at the time of the accident: Hiram Smith; James McKenna; J. O'Neil, an Englishman who is buying lumber in New Brunswick; Dr. C.A. Kirkpatrick of Woodstock; Miss Kierstead of Machias, Me., who was returning home from school; and Harry Henderson, the auditor of the Dominion Express Co. The train which broke through the bridge was made up of seven freight, one first class, and a combination baggage car which went down with the broken span. The locomotive with Engineer Matthews and Fireman McCluskey in the cab sank to the bottom. Neither of them knew how they escaped, but did so almost without a scratch. Mr. McKenna is one of the most seriously

injured, one of his arms and one finger are broken, and he is hurt internally, but at the last report was improving.

Smith was severely crushed but no bones broken. Miss Kierstead escaped with a scratched hand. Dr. Kirkpatrick had a cut head, Mr. O'Neil had his left side injured and an arm and ankle sprained. The river where the accident occurred is twenty feet deep and the level of the bridge twenty five feet above water. Friday night about 10 o'clock a CPR engine with crew left Temiscouata Railway to Edmundston and from there over the CPR to the bridge. This engine will assist in transfer of passengers and freight at the Edmundston side of the bridge and assist in raising the wreckage.

I was told at the time by Ralph Kirkpatrick that there was a seventh passenger on the train, presumably unknown to the others. He was a tramp that had hitched a ride and at first, on finding himself in the water, did not dare cry for help for fear of being discovered. He was lucky enough to get hold of timber from the train's cargo, but as he was carried down river toward the falls, one of his fears overcame the other. He began to cry for help and was rescued before he reached the brink of the falls. Undoubtedly, it being June, the rush of water was less than it would have been earlier in the spring when nothing might have saved him"