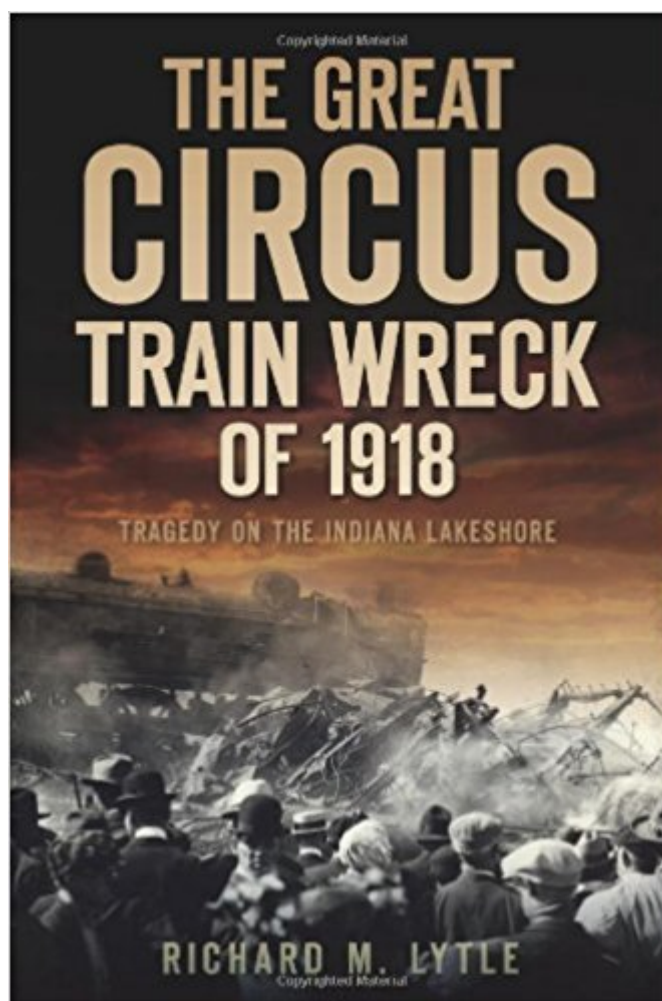


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The Great Circus Train Wreck Of 1918: Tragedy On The Indiana Lakeshore (Disaster)



Synopsis

In the cool, pre-dawn hours on a June night in 1918, a train engineer closed his cab window as he chugged toward Hammond, Indiana. He drifted to sleep, and his train bore down on the idle Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus Train. Soon after, the sleeping engineer's locomotive plowed into the circus train. In the subsequent wreckage and blaze, more than two hundred circus performers were injured and eighty-six were killed, most of whom were interred in a mass grave in the Showmen's Rest section of Chicago's Woodlawn Cemetery. Join local historian Richard Lytle as he recounts, in the fullest retelling to date, the details of this tragedy and its role in the overall evolution and demise of a unique entertainment industry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Richard Lytle is the local history librarian at the Hammond Public Library and an officer of the Hammond Historical Society. He has previously published two books on military history, *The Soldiers of America's First Army: 1791* and *The Old Guard in 1898*, and has been eager to write this book since taking on his post at the library eight years ago and gaining access to its collection of unpublished train wreck photos.

This tragic tale of a circus train catastrophe seems to be relatively unknown outside the area in which it occurred. It's a very short book and the actual train accident only accounts for a few pages.

The beginning of the book is heavy on detail about the rail system and the budding towns alongside the railway. There is of course some history about the forging of this particular circus and the reader learns a little about the circus members themselves. The last portion of the book describes improvements in rail cars since the accident. My rating of a 3 is really more generous than I'd typically give a book that only superficially discussed the event itself. However, it would seem callous to judge a book about the horrific loss of life and the devastation of countless families on quality of writing alone.

Warren Reeder's "No Performances Today", from about 1970 is a vastly better treatment of this subject -- in particular what happened to the survivors, and to the estates of those killed or maimed for life, in the decade-long aftermath. This shows me a highly biased slant in favor of the Michigan Central railroad, and an indefensible court/jury decisions. You can read Reeder's book via intra-library loan from the library in Dallas, Texas. Here I am again three years later, and I'll try to amplify the above. Although the historical review of early beginnings around Hammond, Indiana is informative, the treatment of the train wreck itself and it's aftermath is appalling, especially in view of the Interstate Commerce Commission report and Warren Reeder's book. Both are abundantly clear in showing who was at fault, here, and who bore the responsibility for restitution: The Michigan Central Railroad. They paid a few dollars north of zero, for the horrific loss of life and employability, to say nothing of those killed. To a veteran railroader, Lytle's book reads like a revisionist cover-up of the Michigan Central's callous treatment of the victims. Since the MEC is long defunct, absorbed by the New York Central and then Conrail, this book's content leaves one dumbstruck that a modern writer would write something so, so unnecessary. Just read the recorded comments of Alonzo Sargent, locomotive engineer, Michigan Central.

Great review of a forgotten piece of history.

A tragic story, and a must read for those who loved/love the circus. It is incredibly touching and a book that will hold your interest from beginning to end.

Lots of good info and pictures

This book was very interesting and well researched. It is about a part of Lake County Indiana history that many people do not have much knowledge about. The author's writing made it very easy to

understand what the circus was like at the time of the crash and how, exactly, this crash happened. I learned a lot and enjoyed reading it which is all you can ask for.

Reading and enjoying

I got this book for my father he loved it and still looks through it to this day..he wanted this book bc his father and grandfather were part of the circus and he thinks they may have been at this.. thanks it did take a lil longer then i expected to get here but other then that five stars!!!!

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