

# ISCHUA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## FREIGHT CARS PILE UP AT BIRD CROSSING

The freight train appeared to stop, blocking the Bird Crossing. Mrs. Keith Krotz looked up the Baltimore and Ohio track and saw coal, spilling from the cars. It looked odd. Along the 1,200 feet of twisted rails and gouged gravel bed, 19 loaded cars had jumped the track, snapping track spikes, hurling ties and heaving in collision to fall in zigzags across the north-south stretch of the line, near Beaver Meadows (the swamp). The jumble lay a quarter-mile from Route 242, southwest of Machias.



"It didn't seem to make any more noise than cars normally do, when they jounce together," Mrs. Krotz said. She and her little daughter had walked across the tracks west to the Frank Novak home, a few minutes before the derailment. She saw the approaching north-bound engine. It was driven by D.G. Reeves of Rochester. The diesel was pulling 146 cars to Rochester from Salamanca and had left Ashford Junction at 2:45 D.S.T.

When its derailed cars ploughed through the railroad, one coal car cracked a telephone pole snapping communication to Machias Junction. Block operator Melvin Slocum at the Junction had no signal of the wreck. He knew the freight was overdue. Then a call relayed from Limestone came to Machias from Punzsautawney, Pennsylvania, a half hour after the train was due, reporting the pileup. Seven coal cars had capsized, spilling their loads. Two others had rammed across the track, a hole ripped in the side of one. Three gondola cars carrying the timber were wrecked, across the snaked rails. Gaps of 170 feet separated the capsized cars from eight standing box cars, two with their wheels off the rails.

Maintenance Superintendent D. Lucas of Warsaw counted the damage and ordered repair crews and salvage equipment to the scene, as the news of the wreck spread. Cars began arriving with the curious as a gang of railmen started loading ties on an electric car at 5:30 pm. No immediate cause of the pileup was apparent. A rail official said that last weekend a track gang had broken open a beaver dam at Devereaux and had bulldozed another open, only a day before the wreck. "Water backed up from the dam could have undermined the roadbed causing an up and down action of the tracks as the cars passed over them. The derailed cars shattered one more beaver dam Tuesday that led to a freak accident a mile away. Crews worked through the night and had new track laid for clear traffic passage late Wednesday afternoon. The Bentley-Russel firm from Franklinville was employed to move freight carts by bulldozer. It was estimated that the wreck cost the railroad \$50,000. All the cars were salvaged from the wreck and no one was injured.

THE FRANKLINVILLE SENTINEL, May 15, 1962. Submitted by William Watkins.