


**NOW  
&  
AND THEN**


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**Hundreds of rescuers and spectators fill East State Street at South Dock Street after a freight train collided with a streetcar on Feb. 19, 1910, in Sharon. Note the people who climbed utility poles for a better view.**

**Below, the scene today, with none of the original buildings left.**

## Bygone modes of transportation converge in Sharon

By John Zavinski

**O**N THE SURFACE, the scene from 101 years ago this month is a tragic collision of a streetcar and a freight train. But closer study reveals the deeper symbolism that this is a convergence of several modes of transportation, most now extinct.

The view is looking southeast on East State Street west of South Dock Street. None of the buildings shown exists anymore. That's the current site of *The Herald* in the background where the Rankin hotel stood. The Sharon Telegraph newspaper was in the same block. Beyond it is the Hamory Bank/Dollar Title building.

At about 4 in the afternoon of Feb. 19, 1910, a freight train was backing up toward State Street from the north on the New Castle branch of the Erie Railroad. It was moving at about the pace of a man running, witnesses told the Telegraph.

The streetcar motorman, 40-year-old Merton Ryhal, thought he saw a "come on" wave from the rail-crossing watchman and started the Sharon-West Middlesex car down the hill. Then he saw the train. He hit the brakes but it drifted onto the tracks;

the snow-covered brake shoes wouldn't hold.

The streetcar was halfway through the crossing when the freight car struck it, lifted it off the rails and crushed its wooden sides.

About 20 people suffered cuts, bruises and broken bones, including five who were trapped beneath the wreckage for more than an hour.

According to slightly conflicting lists from the Telegraph and the Pittsburgh Press, the injured, in addition to Ryhal, were: Beatrice Helsel or Hassell, 6, Wheatland, and her grandfather, name not listed; George Collins, 40, Sharon; Mrs. Henry Clark, West Middlesex; Mrs. Clara Artherholt, Wheatland; postmaster J.W. Miller, South Sharon (Farrell); Mrs. Clyde Powell, West Middlesex; C.D. Bernard, 23 or 33, Sharon, formerly of Meadville; Mrs. Jennie M'Gowan, Sharon; Mrs. Minnie Carmack and son, South Sharon; Tony Jenk, South Sharon; John Moppy, South Sharon; D.W. Broad, Sharon; Charles Perkins, 47 or 55, Wheatland or South Sharon, and his daughters Beatrice, 1, and Naomi, 6; Naomi Helsel, 4, Wheatland; Elizabeth Mansell, 17, Wheat-



John Zavinski/Life & Times

land; conductor Henry Lewis, Bonaqua, Tenn.; C.H. Bateman, 19, West Middlesex; and Arnie Martsellar, a teacher in South Sharon.

The Telegraph boasted the next day that it had 3,300 copies of an extra edition on the street within 40 minutes, trouncing the competition (*The Herald*). That's probably close to its daily circulation then.

As for the convergence, we have streetcars (which ran here from 1892-1939) and railroads. There's also an earlier transportation artery, the Erie Extension Canal. The canal ran through Sharon from 1840-72; this stretch of rails took over the canal bed.

In the distant left are two people atop horseback, a mode of transportation replaced by the automobile, two of which appear to be between the horses and the boxcar (though they may be horse carriages).

Today, the automobile has overtaken all these modes in these parts, except for a few trains. But every now and then, they, too, still collide. ♦