

History Trail Run – The Husted Train Wreck
By Jack Anthony, Wilber H. Fulker, & Wilber F. Fulker

This article gives a first hand account of the August 14, 1909 train wreck at Husted. I wish to thank and dedicate this article to Wilber H. Fulker, whose dad Wilber F. Fulker, was a teenager on the southbound passenger train that collided with a northbounder on the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. Wilber's dad wrote up notes about the accident and also had his camera with him and snapped 6 photos of the scene. I used his notes to retell his story that fateful Saturday.

Perhaps the name Wilber Fulker rings a bell. The beautiful fountain in Acacia Park is Uncle Wilber's fountain. It is a favorite of kids, and some adults too as they dash and giggle in the pulsating spouts of water. Uncle Wilber's fountain is located on the southwest corner of the park. Wilber has helped me with my history research and is just a joy to talk with. He's a railroad enthusiast and historian, and Wilbur has shared a lot of insight and stories of Monument and the rich railroading history of this area. Wilber is presently living at the Brighton Gardens Senior Home near Bear Creek Park. Wilber's on the mend from an injury, recovering quite nicely, and I anxiously await his wellness and strength so that he can accompany me on site explorations! Here now is Wilber F. Fulker's account of Saturday, August 14, 1909.

“Summer ranch work was winding down for my brother Ivan and I and we were set to take the train down to Colorado Springs for a Saturday of sight seeing. Uncle Lewis Fritz brought us to the Monument Denver & Rio Grande station to catch the morning train south. We got our tickets and met Cleve Norvell and Pete Kendrick who likewise were seeking a break from summer work. We boarded and Ivan was able to find a seat, but Cleve, Pete and I stood in the rear of the passenger seating area in an open anteroom. It wouldn't be too bad standing and maybe at Husted or Edgerton some folks would get off. The train pulled out and we were on our way. The Denver and Rio Grande used one set of tracks for both north and southbound trains, thus precise coordination was the key to safety and success. In the 40 years of railroading in this area, most mishaps were related to high winds blowing trains over. Not today, it was a warm and sunny morning and no hint of a breeze, a great day not to be doing ranch work!”

“As we passed south of Borst Station near Pring and were about 2 miles north of Husted I looked forward at Ivan and the look on his face was one of fear and concern. I also noticed the engineer was really on the whistle as it blared away and steam rocketed out of it. He leapt to his feet and grabbed the rail above and hollered “hang on fellas, we're in trouble”. I couldn't fathom what Ivan meant, but the whistle and now the screeching brakes were met with a crash and jolting impact that threw a lady returning from the rest room through the air and right at Ivan's feet. As all this occurred in what was slow motion, but horrific sound. I was whacked by the lid off the water can that was located in the rear. Luckily I was wearing my Derby Hat and it took the blow instead of my forehead. The hat band was cut, but all I had was a nick...and a need for a new Derby hat, but we had a situation on our hands and needed to act swiftly and get off.”

“Cleve's hat laid on the floor as evacuating passengers gave it several unintended stomps. ‘There goes my John B’ he exclaimed in a rather casual manner

given we were in the midst of a train crash. I lost sight of Ivan in the melee of folks getting off. I jumped down and looked up and down to find Ivan. I watched remaining people getting off and still no Ivan. I went back into the coach, which had a mist of dust and smell of steam. I frantically looked about and then I bumped into a person back to back. I came around and it was Ivan. He was looking for me and had been delayed helping the lady who landed at his feet.”

“Miraculously I still had my camera strapped around my neck. So, I began taking pictures of the wreck. I took six snapshots and then a rather peculiar thing happened. People came up to me and asked me to make prints and send them the prints. People were giving me their addresses and also handing off money in advance. Others said they would send the money. I was overwhelmed and started to realize this was a very serious train wreck as I went forward to what were the north and south bound engines and tenders.”

“Meanwhile, word reached back to Monument that there had been a wreck. Uncle Lewis had left town and when he heard the news he jumped up and said, “Good gosh, I’ve got two nephews on that train!” So he rigged up his horses and rode a wagon all the way to the site. He found us OK but insisted we return with him back to Monument. Gone was the day of touring Colorado Springs.”

“As we milled about we started to learn and see first hand the seriousness and devastation of the accident. Our southbound engineer and fireman saw the inevitable crash coming and after blowing the distress signal and setting the brakes they jumped to safety. In all, 11 people were killed and 42 injured. No one in the southbound train was killed. The lead passenger car of our train had six rows of seats torn out from the floor, all of them were injured.”

“The northbound train was a double header, by that I mean it was a helper engine assisting an engine and set of cars up the steep grade to Palmer Lake. The fireman on that helper was Mr. Jack Gossage who lived in Husted and had just waved to his wife as he headed north on a helper run. He was trapped between the engine and the tender full of coal and died in the accident.”

“My brother Ivan and I did get to tour Colorado Springs the next Saturday, and yes, we took the train.”

Somehow the orders of the day got messed up and a northbound train was released to head north even though a southbound train was coming. In 1918, the federal government mandated that the Denver & Rio Grande and Santa Fe agree to share tracks and have northbound on the Santa Fe line and southbound on the Denver & Rio Grande. Several of Wilber’s photos are included and give insight into just how devastating this crash was.

So, where was this tragic accident? Based on the photos as well as good description by Wilber’s dad, I believe this tragic wreck occurred very close to where the New Santa Fe Regional Trail completes a westbound and downhill stretch and turns north towards Baptist Road trailhead. There is a nice shelter along this stretch of trail and after the

trail turns north it crossed a road that goes under the tracks to the west. In the area to the southwest of this turn in the trail is where the wreck occurred.

Once again, I want to sincerely thank Roger Davis and the staff of the Lucretia Vaile Museum in Palmer Lake. In their collection are all 6 of Wilber F. Fulker's photos taken on August 14, 1909 as well as his notes typed up. Do consider visiting this gem of a local history museum with a staff that will enlighten you and not mind one bit your running attire! Next time we'll head further north on the trail and learn of John Pring's successful ranch and dairy and also meet a colorful character called "the Dirty Woman"....who was quite like Charles Schultz's "Pig Pen" character in Peanuts. So, the next time you are downtown Colorado Springs, do visit Uncle Wilber's Fountain and join the kids as they dash through the spouts of water...it is OK to giggle, even if you are a grown up!

Two of the six photos taken by Wilber F. Fulker on August 14, 1909 follow and are courtesy of Wilber H. Fulker & The Vaile Museum in Palmer Lake, Colorado.



Photo taken by Wilber F. Fulker on August 14, 1909. This photo shows the scene looking south towards Husted. Note the smoke from a train approaching from the south. Courtesy of Wilber H. Fulker & The Vaile Museum



Photo taken by Wilber F. Fulker on August 14, 1909. This photo shows the scene looking southwest. Courtesy of Wilber H. Fulker & The Vaile Museum



Wilber H. Fulker August 2005