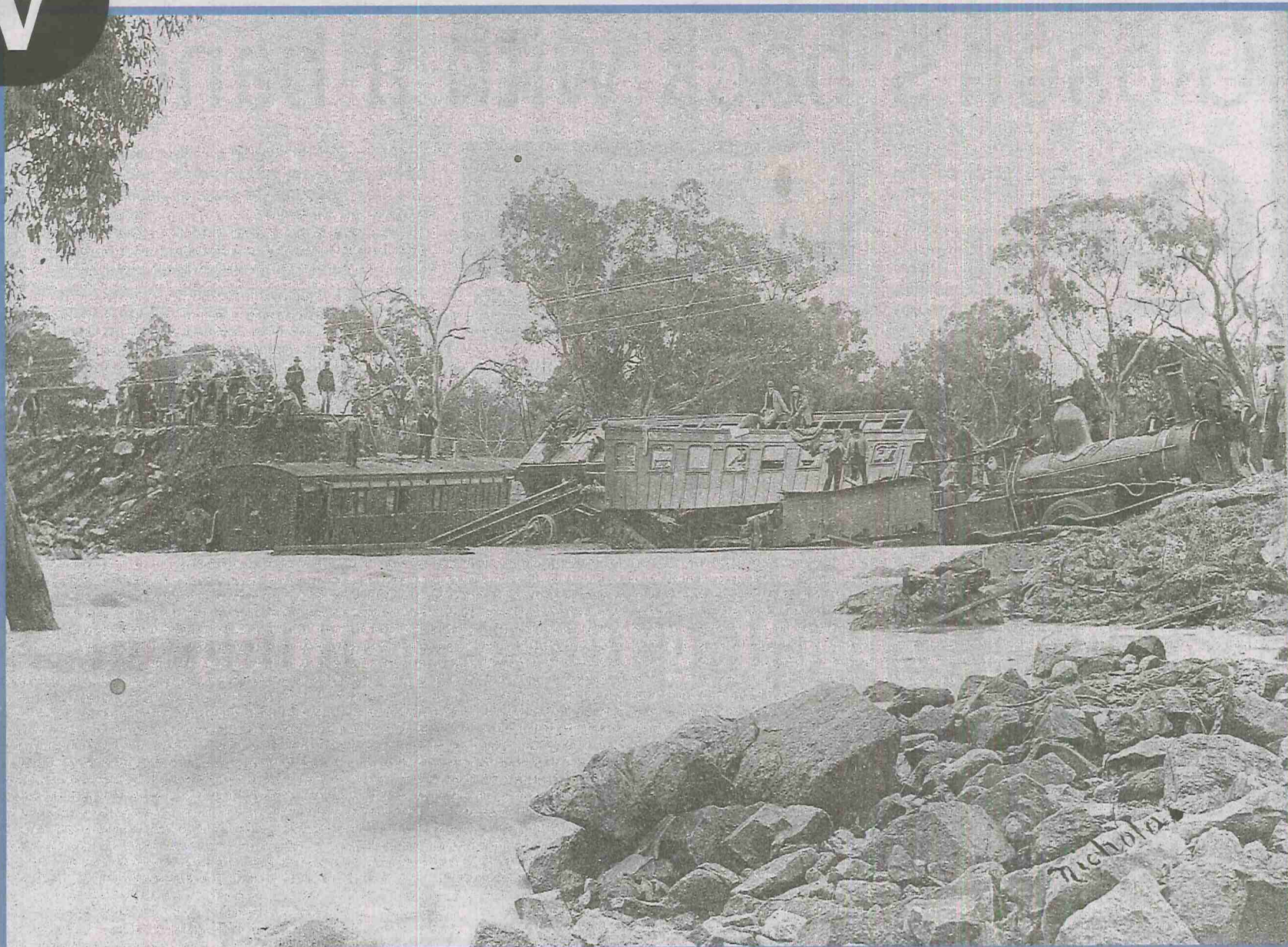


Archives open today

The CSU Regional Archives is currently extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of every month. On these days the Archives will be open from 10am to 3pm. The CSU Regional Archives is open today, June 2. This trial initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the Archives on weekdays during normal business hours. It is hoped that enough researchers and visitors will avail themselves of this service to warrant it becoming a permanent occurrence.

what you need to know

The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



This dramatic image of the Salt Clay Creek rail accident in 1885 was recently deposited with the CSU Regional Archives by the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society [RW2893/339]. The National Library of Australia, State Records NSW, the State Library of NSW and the Powerhouse Museum also hold other photographs and sketches of the disaster, each showing just how devastating this accident was.

Salt Clay Creek accident

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



The opening of the southern railway in the 1870s and early 1880s made a huge difference for people travelling between Sydney and Melbourne.

Although passengers had to change trains at Albury because of the difference in the rail gauge of the two states, this mode of travel increased in popularity and became preferential for country people.

A dangerous situation

AN ANNIVERSARY Day (Australia Day) Horse Racing meeting in Sydney on Monday, January 26, 1885 attracted many racing enthusiasts from Melbourne and they joined the mail train on Sunday, January 25, including bookmakers Mr Joe Thompson and John Pattison.

That weekend, 10 inches of rain had fallen in Cootamundra, causing the normally slow-flowing Salt Clay Creek to become a wide, raging torrent which swept the ballast from under the railway line further down the creek, leaving the rails suspended in mid-air and resembling a suspension bridge.

Complications arose with the creek being washed out in two places closer into the town of Cootamundra, resulting in the telegraph wire being cut. This prevented any warning getting through to the stationmaster at Bethungra and therefore Driver Moody was completely unaware of the dangerous situation ahead.

The ill-fated mail train consisted of engine and tender, a second-class carriage, a sleeper carriage, a first-class carriage, a mail van and a brake van. At designated places during the trip, all trains were routinely checked by carriage examiners; this train was inspected at Junee as usual and the brakes, wheels, etc were in order.

An ill-fated train

THE train left Bethungra at 7.14pm and arrived at the washed out culvert at 7.45pm. As the train turned the bend it was evident the embankment had washed away and Driver Moody slammed on the brakes.

Sadly, this action came too late and the engine tumbled first, almost standing upright. The second-class carriage and the mail van went next, crashing alongside the engine; the sleeping van followed with the first-class carriage falling and telescoping it, splitting the roof and sides. The brake van was the last to fall.

Immediately following the accident, the area was a scene of confusion. It was dark and pouring with rain; on the Cootamundra side of the creek there were about 30 people who had managed to escape from the carriages before they toppled into the creek.

Seven people were killed: Mrs Mary Hodson, wife of John Hodson, ironmonger of Fitzmaurice Street Wagga; Joseph Campey, railway fireman, travelling as a passenger; Alfred Wilson, railway guard; John Hade, 9 years old from Carcoar; William Bergen, 25 years of age from Carcoar; John O'Dwyer and Harry Holmes.

An hour passed before medical assistance could reach the site. One of the Cobb and Co's coaches tried to manoeuvre through to the scene but the wet ground would not take the weight. After being forced to abandon several light buggies, they managed to get through.

Mr M Solomon's Assembly Hall was used as a temporary hospital and by midnight all the injured were accommodated except for one man - Mr Stone - who proved to be very difficult to move from the site and he was

admitted about 4am.

There were about 23 passengers who sustained slight to severe injuries, including spinal and internal injuries, broken ribs, severe bruising, broken bones, cuts and abrasions. Driver Moody was badly scalded.

The passengers who escaped without injury were Henry Giles and JH Wood of Albury; J McDonald, Risby Patterson, Oscar J Knowlman, Wellesly Wellman of Wagga, Lamby of Dunedin; Zucker, R Murphy and E Gomm of Hay and Mrs Ryan of Temora.

Continued difficulties

FURTHER tragedy was averted when the guard, Samuel Murray, who was not injured, remembered that a goods train was following. He managed to get some fog signals and a red light off the rear of his van. He ran back on the line and when he met the goods train he stopped it and the crew were able to get back to Bethungra.

A wire was sent to Inspector Roberts of Junee informing him of the accident.

Mr Roberts arrived at the scene in a special engine from Junee and arrangements were made for a temporary railway line to be constructed over the gaps.

However, owing to a heavy thunderstorm realising 123 points of rain on Tuesday, January 27, the temporary line was completely washed away stopping railway traffic once again.

Until arrangements could be made for the reconstruction of the permanent line, passengers were compelled to walk a distance of about 300 metres to join a train and continue their journey in either direction.

A comprehensive coronial enquiry report of this tragic accident can be read in the *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* in the editions of January 27 and 29, 1885.

Compiled by June Dietrich

References: *Wagga Wagga Advertiser*: January 27, 1885; January 29, 1885; *The Australian Town and Country Journal*: February 21, 1885 p.14