

AWFUL ACCIDENT.

**From Sixty-Five to Eighty Persons Killed.
By the Fall of a Span of the Louisville and Jeffersonville Bridge.**

A Frightful Scene of Death and Disaster.

The Dead Buried Under the Heavy Iron Structure. Their Bodies Cannot Be Recovered Till Machinery is Procured to Move the Bridge.

An Awful Scene of Agony Among the Relatives of the Dead.

One of the most frightful accidents that has occurred in this country happened this forenoon near 10 o'clock, at the new bridge building between Louisville and Jeffersonville. An entire span of the bridge, upon which about one hundred men were at work fell into the river below, a distance of over one hundred feet, and was totally wrecked.

The men at work on the span, which was just about completed, went down with it, and many were crushed to death or so mangled that they drowned in the river.

A high wind was blowing at the time of the accident, and the alleged imperfect workmanship, caused the span to go down into the seething flood below.

Eye witnesses describe it as a terrible sight. The heavy iron of which the bridge is built snapped asunder like pipe stems, and the broken girders, braces, cross pieces and other material, were thrown in all directions, striking and mangling the unfortunate workmen and carrying them down, frightfully mangled to death. People on the shore held their breath, shuddering in horror at the scene. There were wild cries from the workmen as the span began to sway and crack, but this was but for a few seconds, for the heavy structure rushed downward with lightning speed, and there was no chance for help or escape. A moment later and all voices were hushed.

Then commenced the struggle for life in the river with those who had escaped mangling by the cruel iron. Boats were instantly secured and the work of rescue commenced; but of all those on the span when it fell but few escaped.

The span fell in two sections, that nearest the Indiana shore, upon which was the "traveler," falling first, followed almost immediately by the next section. Immediately after the false works between the shore and the pier to which the span was nearly completed, went down with a crash, carrying about twenty-five persons with it. Nearly all those reached the shore in safety. Three or four, however, were badly mangled and will probably die.

When the iron span let go the breakage of the iron sounded like a great discharge of musketry. The span swayed backward and forward for a moment and then plunged forward like a great serpent; the great pieces of iron breaking into fragments.

The loss of life was terrible. The lowest estimate of the number at work on the iron span is one hundred. Of this number sixty-five are believed to be buried under the heavy iron work at the bottom of the river. Seven dead bodies had been recovered up to 12:30 this afternoon. Of those but one was recognized, James Byrnes, of Philadelphia.

Oliver F. Moore, of Philadelphia, Zack Westlock, of Pennsylvania, and Harry Lee, of New Albany, were all rescued, badly wounded. Moore's injuries will prove fatal, as he is crushed from the waist down, both legs literally broken to fragments and both arms broken. Lee and Westlock, it is believed, will recover. Lee was rescued by Jerry Bosley, of Jeffersonville, and is at Bosley's home in that city. The other two injured men are at the Jeffersonville infirmary.

The bridge lays in a mass in the river as it fell. Many dead bodies are plainly in sight among the broken iron, but held so tightly that it is impossible to release them until the iron is raised. It will take powerful machinery to raise it. It is a great mass of hundreds of tons in weight.

Many with poles felt the dead down amid the debris of the bridge, and in this manner over thirty dead bodies were located.

It is thought that there are two or three New Albany men among the dead, as there were, in all, five New Albanians at work on the bridge. Four of these are said to have been at work to-day, and out of this number Harry Lee is the only one yet reported alive. Superintendent Moore says, however, that he thinks all these New Albany men except possibly two were at work putting up the false work and thinks they escaped.

There were some heart-rending scenes at the river. Wives, children and mothers stood upon the river bank weeping, moaning and wringing their hands in fear and awe of the dreadful scene before them and of the fate of husbands, fathers or sons. One old lady, whose hair was white as snow, was inconsolable. "My three sons are lost," she moaned. "They were all on the iron span - I know they must be killed. Oh! God, help me in my grief and misery and old age." Persons who saw and heard her wept like children.

The iron span had been completed to within three or four feet of the pier, and yet, strange to say, no cable or iron girders had been thrown out to tie it to the pier. The great span hung out full three hundred and seventy feet from the south pier, and why, at so near a distance to the north pier it was not tied on to this north pier will never be answered. The man who superintended the

work lies dead under the massive structure, tied by it to the bottom of the Ohio river, and can never make an explanation.

The material in the fallen span is so broken that it cannot be again used, it is thought, or but a small portion of it at most.

Zack Westlock, who is at the Jeffersonville infirmary, said to the *LEDGER* that he thought there was from one hundred to one hundred and twenty men at work on this iron span when it fell, and from twenty-five to thirty on the false work. "It is my belief," he said, "that when the dead are all recovered they will number from seventy-five to eighty. I saw but very few men in the river when I was rescued." Westlock's injuries are not dangerous, his right arm being broken, a gash out on the right side of the head extending from the forehead to the crown, and some bruises on the body.

The man that was on the "traveler" jumped when he heard the cracking of the iron span, but the "traveler" overtook and fell upon him and his body now lies under it.

A few men at the south end of the span when they heard the cracking of the iron fled to the next span south and were saved. There were about a dozen of these.

Prior to this awful disaster thirty-five men had been killed in the construction of this bridge. At one time 18 were suffocated and drowned in a caisson. Other fatalities followed rapidly upon this. In the accident of to-day, those who witnessed it all agree in the statement that there was a wild shriek and a throwing up of arms among the unfortunate victims. Then the plunge was so sudden that all stood appalled and heard no more till the iron struck the water. The noise of the crash was heard all over the town of Jeffersonville.

The disaster is a great blow to the new bridge company and will doubtless be very expensive to it in the way of damages to the families of the killed.

Dr. Payton, of the prison south, who witnessed the disaster, rendered valuable service to the injured that were rescued.

Simon E. Lee, of this city, was employed on the bridge but did not work to-day.

John F. Lamb, of this city, was at work on the bridge, it is said, and is reported missing and was probably killed.

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BRIDGE DISASTER.

Another Span of the Structure Falls Into the River.

**The Number of Killed Reduced to Twenty-One.
Henry Pleiss, of New Albany, Among the Dead.**

**The Loss Falls on the Phoenix Bridge Company
that Has the Contract to Erect the Bridge.**

The General Opinion that Imperfect Workmanship Caused the Disaster.

Span No. 3 of the Louisville and Jeffersonville Bridge followed Span No. 4 into the Ohio river at 8:10 o'clock Friday night, causing a total wreck and blockading the regular steamboat channel. Fortunately there was no one on this span when it fell. It simply let go from its moorings on the piers and went down with a great crash.

The estimated loss by the falling of these two spans is \$135,000, and the loss will fall upon the Phoenix Bridge Company, that has the contract to erect the structure.

The number killed has been greatly reduced from the first estimate. It is stated by the superintendent that there were eighty men at work on the bridge when the first span fell at ten o'clock Friday morning. Of this number twenty-one are known to be killed and three others received supposed fatal injuries. Seven dead bodies had been recovered up to 11 o'clock to-day, and the remainder of the dead are under the heavy iron work of the bridge, or carried off by the current below the falls. Sixteen are more or less badly injured, three of them as above stated, supposedly fatally.

Among the killed is Henry Pleiss, of New Albany, who resided in a handsome home owned by him on East Fifteenth, between Grant and Spring streets. Mr. Pleiss was forty-two years old and leaves a wife, but no children. He was employed on the bridge to carry bolts in a skiff from the shore to the men engaged in erecting the false work for pier No. 5. He had brought over a load of bolts and while one of the wood bosses, Kit Carson, sat in the boat, Mr. Pleiss had carried a load of bolts up on the woodwork and placed them for the workmen. Then the crash came, a heavy timber striking Mr. Pleiss and knocking him in the river. He sank to rise no more alive. He and Carson had been talking in the skiff before he went up onto the false work about the killing of Abner Phelps, employed on the bridge, by an electric car in this city. Mr. Pleiss remarked to Mr. Carson: "Who knows how soon our time may come in this dangerous business – how soon a timber may fall and crush us to death." A few minutes later the catastrophe came that hurled him to death.

The body of Mr. Pleiss is not yet recovered. He was a brother of Mrs. William Merker, and Messrs. John and Louis G. Pleiss.

John F. Lamb, a bridge builder of this city, who it was feared was in the wreck of pier No. 4, and the false work between No. 4 and 5, was not at work on the bridge when the disaster overtook it, and therefore is safe. He was at work elsewhere.

Harry Lee, of this city, makes the following statement of his wonderful escape from death: "I was at work on the top of the 'traveler,' 185 feet above the water when the alarm was given, but I can't tell who first discovered the danger. There were three men with me. When the span began to topple I was for a moment paralyzed by the catastrophe I was sure was on us, but as the traveler swayed and finally fell I clung to it until it was within a few feet of the water, when I sprang outward on the south side, and it was then I felt the pain in my side caused by striking an extending beam. I never lost consciousness. I had on a pair of arctic overshoes, and after I had fallen into the water these hampered me and I kicked them off. I was rescued by Jerry Bosley, a son of Rev. T. G. Bosley, of Jeffersonville, and taken to his father's house in that town, where I received every attention. Bosley saved my life.

"My father, Simon A. Lee, was standing on the bank watching the work when the span fell, and he never expected to see me alive again. I told my father last Saturday that the false work was too light and was insecure. There were from 70 to 90 men at work on the span, but many of them escaped by running to the pier and the other span. I saw five men hurled from the north pier. It was just 10 o'clock when it happened, for only a few minutes before that I had examined my watch, and told George Lecount that it was too late for any disaster to-day, because the Licking silver bridge fell at 10, and I referred to that calamity."

Mr. Lee boards with his father at the residence of policeman Mitchell, No. 220 West Spring street, where he now is. His injuries are painful, but not dangerous. His escape from death was miraculous.

George Fisher, of this city, son of the late W. M. Fisher, was at work on the bridge when the collapse occurred, but escaped without injury. He has been in the employ of the Phoenix Bridge Co. for eight years.

The general judgment of the workmen and the citizens is that the disaster was caused by imperfect workmanship. The wind Friday forenoon was not sufficiently strong to cause the disaster. The falling of span No. 3 last night was probably caused by the high wind and the weakened condition of the span from the forenoon's calamity.

Up to Tuesday night ten victims had been recovered from the debris of the wrecked Louisville and Jeffersonville bridges, and there are at least twelve more in the river under the iron and timbers. It is not likely work will be resumed on the bridge before next spring. It will take a large force of men two or three months to remove the two wrecked spans from the river.

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