In the Flood of 1913:
Tragedy at Blue Hole

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Shortly after ten o'clock in the morning of March 4, 1913, a cloudy and crisp day in the federal city of Washington, President-elect Woodrow Wilson called at the White House. He was greeted by the outgoing chief executive, the ponderous and good-humored William Howard Taft, and a few minutes later the two men were moving in a four-horse landau up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. On a platform erected above the east steps of the great limestone and marble building Wilson repeated the presidential oath, then in a stirring inaugural address proclaimed that the time had come to reform America's society.¹ In the days that followed, Wilson and his "New Freedom" administration commanded the front pages of the country's newspapers, and on March 11 the twenty-seventh president announced that the United States would not extend official recognition to the new revolutionary government of Mexico—a "government of butchers," he called it privately.²

Then, in the third week of the Wilson presidency, the attention of Americans was diverted from politics and diplomacy. During the night of March 20-21 tornadoes accompanied by rain, sleet, and hail lashed a wide area from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes. Described in one news account as "the most terrific equinoctical storm in years," the atmospheric outburst reportedly left as many as a hundred people dead,

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¹ New York Times, March 5, 1913.
most of them in the southern states.\(^3\) Worse unfortunately was yet to come. On the evening of Easter Sunday, March 23, tornadoes and high winds ravaged an area from the Dakotas and Oklahoma eastward to Indiana. Hardest hit were Omaha, Nebraska, and Terre Haute, Indiana, where tornadoes claimed ninety-four and twenty-one lives respectively.\(^4\)

Alas, the ordeal of a vast area of mid-America was just beginning. Accompanying the tornadoes and winds of March 23 were heavy rains that continued through the following day. Because of the presence of stationary high pressure systems over lower Canada and the Bermuda Islands, the low pressure cell that was producing the rain—now centered over Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio—could not move. Indeed a great low pressure trough, wedged between the two high pressure systems, extended from Texas to New England; and while rain drenched the upper reaches of the Ohio River watershed on March 24, a second rainstorm was moving up the trough toward the first. When the two storms joined, on March 25, the outcome was a veritable deluge.\(^5\) In addition to Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, the lower region of the Ohio River watershed and also parts of Arkansas, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and New York were victims of torrential rains.\(^6\)

At length, on March 27, the high pressure system over the Bermudas gave way, and that over lower Canada moved out to the Atlantic; whereupon, the rainstorm drizzled to an end. But over a great area of the Ohio River watershed more than six inches of rain had fallen in the period of March 23-27, and in an area reaching from southeastern Illinois across northern

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\(^3\) Indianapolis Star, March 22, 1913. No official figures on the death toll of the storm of March 20-21, 1913, are available. If death tolls published in newspapers in the days that followed—in the aftermath of a similar storm on March 23 and during the great flood of late March-early April, 1913—are any guide, the figure of approximately one hundred given in news reports on March 22 was wildly inflated.

\(^4\) Indianapolis Star, March 24, 1913; U.S., Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau, Monthly Weather Review, XLI (March, 1913), 359, 396, 481-84.


Ohio the rainfall had been between eight and eleven inches. "At no time in the history of the Ohio Valley has so much rain fallen in a 72-hour period as fell last March 23-27," disclosed a report published the following year. "In many local areas, as large an amount of rain has fallen in an equal length of time, but never has there been such a heavy rainfall over so large an area in so short a time" (see Figure 1).

The result of so much rain over such a vast area in so little time was one of the most devastating natural disasters in American history: the flood of 1913.

Because of considerable rainfall in the previous days of March, the ground across the upper Ohio River watershed, as well as in other parts of the country, was saturated when the heavy rain commenced on March 23 and thus could absorb little of the downpour. For the same reason the rivers and streams of the upper Ohio Valley were well up in their banks. In the first twenty-four hours of the rainstorm, accordingly, rivers and streams in the upper Ohio Valley began to overflow. In the days and weeks ahead large areas of the Ohio and lower Mississippi valleys were inundated—as were the Hudson River Valley in New York and the Connecticut River Valley in New England.8

For railroad men, of course, nothing was quite so frightening as the prospect of a great flood; and as murky water inched up the measuring gauges in the upper Ohio Valley and spread across the countryside in the last days of March, 1913, they saw their worst fears come true. The water smashed against bridges and fills, passed over mile after mile of track, and flooded stations and storage facilities. It brought freight and passenger operations to a virtual standstill. Indeed, if all the armies of Europe had invaded the upper Ohio Valley on March 23, 1913, it is doubtful that in the next week they could have wrought as much devastation to the railroads of the region as did the flood waters.

No rail lines were harder struck than those of the mighty Pennsylvania, "the Standard Railroad of the World." In the words of a contemporary commentator, the Pennsylvania "was ripped and torn asunder by the floods." Between Mineral City and Newark in Ohio the Muskingum River and its tributaries

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8 Bybee and Malott, "Flood of 1913," 126.

produced a fifty-one-mile lake that washed over the Pennsylvania's main line from Pittsburgh to Columbus. Between Masillon and Mansfield thirty miles of the Pittsburgh-Chicago line were inundated (see Figure 2). The angry water destroyed or severely weakened seventy-four steel bridges of the Pennsylvania, washed out roadbed at literally thousands of points, and marooned (during one day) some nineteen passenger trains.9

Lying south of nearly all the western lines of the Pennsylvania was the Baltimore and Ohio Southwestern, a subsidiary of the Baltimore and Ohio. Like the Pennsylvania, the B&OSW was staggered by the flood, particularly from Cincinnati to the Wabash River (on the present-day St. Louis Division of the Chessie System). The Ohio River overflowed B&OSW rails between Cincinnati and Lawrenceburg, Indiana. The East Fork of White River inundated much of the B&OSW between Brownstown and Rivervale and between Willow Valley and Loogootee and washed away the girder bridge near Medora. Track was flooded between Wheatland and Fritchton, and when upstream levees finally gave way, the Wabash rolled over the B&OSW rails just west of Vincennes, on the Allison Prairie in Illinois.10

But it was at a place called Blue Hole, a mile and a half west of the B&OSW locomotive and car shops at Washington, Indiana, where the B&OSW's most memorable happening of the flood of 1913 came to pass.

Just west of the shops the rails of the single-track B&OSW moved on to an earthen fill that carried them for three and a half miles—at heights of ten to fifteen feet—across the sandy bottomland of the twisting, meandering West Fork of White River (see Figure 3). Nine hundred yards from the beginning of the fill, moving east to west, the B&OSW passed over the abandoned ditch of the Wabash and Erie Canal, a ghostly monument to the dreams of canal enthusiasts of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Five hundred yards beyond the canal it passed over Blue Hole, a body of water that was approximately two hundred feet wide, four hundred feet long, and thirty to forty feet deep.11

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10 Washington, Indiana, *Democrat*, March 25, 26, 27, 29, 1913. The archives of the Chessie System contain no documentary material pertaining to the flood in southern Indiana and Illinois. The Chessie archives are located in Baltimore, Maryland.
11 The exact dimensions of Blue Hole before the flood of 1913 are unknown. Visiting the hole a few weeks after the flood, Bybee and Malott found it to be
After the Flood Came

The Breaks Show Where the Track was Out of Commission—The Impossibility of Through Train Service is Obvious

FIGURE 2

Reproduced from Lewis S. Bigelow, "The Ohio Floods of 1913," in Blaen Thompson, comp. and ed., The Railway Library, 1913 (Chicago, 1914), 236, 237
Interestingly, when the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad (predecessor of the B&OSW) constructed the fill in the early 1850s, Blue Hole had not existed. The hole received its birth during the great flood of 1875 when waters of the West Fork of White River pounded against the O&M roadbed, broke through at that point, and as a result of the downward swirling action of the current scoured the hole from the sandy bottomland. The O&M thereupon constructed a timber and pile trestle of 284 feet across the upper end of the new scour hole—a hole that in a few years came to be called Blue Hole.

Four hundred yards beyond Blue Hole the B&OSW crossed Prairie Creek via a single-span girder bridge at a point just before the creek emptied into a bend in White River called Ninety-Foot Hole (a misnomer, for the normal depth of the river at the mouth of Prairie Creek was not nearly ninety feet). Approximately one mile west of Prairie Creek the B&OSW crossed White River over a two-span truss bridge of 450 feet that had gone up in 1894, one year after the B&OSW took over the line from the O&M. Several hundred yards beyond the latter bridge the rails of the B&OSW exited the bottomland.

Less than twenty-four hours after the skies opened and the great downpour of 1913 began, on Monday, March 24, the banks of the West Fork of White River in the Daviess-Knox County area reached the end of their capacity to contain the debris-laden water that was cascading down from the north. The river spilled over into the bottomland, inundated houses and barns, and sent people and farm animals scurrying to the safety of high ground. Soon the overflow from the river made a junction with water that had moved out of the banks of

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350 feet wide, seven hundred feet long, and forty feet deep—about twice as large, they believed, as it had been before the flood. Because of sitting, Blue Hole is considerably smaller in the present day than it was when observed by Bybee and Malott in spring of 1913. Bybee and Malott, "Flood of 1913," 195.


14 The structure over Prairie Creek was a plate girder bridge of the "through" type; that is, the floor system is carried by the bottom flange as opposed to a "deck" type in which the floor system rests on the top flange.

15 Robert F. Smith, *From the Ohio to the Mississippi: A Story of a Railroad* (Cincinnati, 1965), [60].

16 Washington Democrat, March 25, 1913; Washington, Indiana, Gazette, March 28, 1913. The Gazette was a weekly publication; the author has been unable to locate the daily Washington Herald for the spring of 1913.
Prairie Creek. Still, the rails of the B&OSW, riding atop the fill many feet above the bottomland, seemed secure; and Atlantic-powered passenger trains and Consolidation-powered freights, their exhausts blasting momentary holes in the downpour, continued to thunder across what trackmen called "the river section."18

In the first thirty hours after the downpour began, in truth, the flood situation appeared more menacing at other points on the B&OSW. Far to the east of the West Fork bottomland, the Ohio River and the East Fork of White River were pressing about the railroad. To the west, at Beman, Illinois, the rushing overflow of the Wabash had weakened roadbed, requiring trains to slow to a crawl. Then, on Tuesday, March 25—the day the downpour turned into a torrent—countless washouts forced the annulment of all B&OSW trains between Washington, Indiana, and Cincinnati. Several hundred passengers on four eastbound trains that had arrived from St. Louis found themselves stranded in Washington, a town of eight thousand people. They secured lodging in local hotels and private homes (at B&OSW expense) and in sleeping cars that the company parked on a siding near the depot.19

By Wednesday, March 26, the downpour abated to less than a fourth of what it had been the day before in most areas of the upper Ohio River watershed.20 In the West Fork bottomland in Daviess and Knox counties, of course, the floodwater continued to rise; it passed over Blue Hole and inched toward the Wabash and Erie Canal. More ominously, the water was climbing the B&OSW fill, smashing surflike against the embankment and washing away large chunks of earth. The fill, in truth, had become a veritable levee; water was several feet higher on the north side than on the south and was rushing through the openings at the White River and Prairie Creek bridges and the Blue Hole trestle with murderous force.

17 Designed for speed, an Atlantic-type steam locomotive had a four-wheel leading truck positioned beneath the cylinders near the front of the machine, four large driving wheels (eighty inches in diameter in the case of Atlantics used by the B&OSW), and a two-wheel trailing truck beneath the firebox; in other words, a 4-4-2. Designed for power, a Consolidation had a two-wheel leading truck positioned in front of the cylinders, eight driving wheels of comparatively small diameter, and no trailing truck, a 2-8-0.

18 In the early 1920s the author's grandfather, Emmanuel Daniels, was the foreman of track crews that maintained "the river section."


20 See precipitation tables cited in note 6.
Trackmen, cold and wet, were moving back and forth along the fill and over the bridges and trestle, watching for washouts and removing driftwood and debris.\footnote{Washington Democrat, March 27, 1913; Washington Gazette, March 28, 1913.}

By Thursday, March 27, the rain had stopped in most of the upper Ohio Valley.\footnote{See precipitation tables cited in note 6.} The floodwater continued to rise, however, and in the White River bottomland of Daviess and Knox counties had moved up the B&OSW fill to within a yard of the rails. To make matters worse, the temperature had fallen, and flurrying snow added to the discomfort of the nearly one hundred workmen—many of them normally employed in the locomotive and car shops in Washington—who were feverishly repairing cracks in the fill with thousands of sandbags. It appeared that the men were toiling in vain, for observers expressed scant hope that the fill could be saved. Should the fill or its bridges give way, Washington—totally dependent on rail transportation as were most cities and towns in 1913—would be cut off from the outer world, inasmuch as floodwaters had already immobilized the Chicago and Eastern Illinois branch line (present-day Conrail) that connected the town with points to the north and south.\footnote{Washington Democrat, March 27, 28, 1913; Washington Gazette, March 28, April 4, 1913.}

Then came a brush with disaster.

On the afternoon of March 27 passenger train Number Eleven, assembled for what might be the last run to St. Louis during the flood crisis, was standing at the depot in Washington, some two miles east of the fill. The fireman had built up the steam pressure in the locomotive (almost certainly an Atlantic) at the head of the train. Leaning backward out the cab window, the engineer was peering down the length of the train at the conductor preparatory to getting underway. As the conductor raised his arm to signal the highball, operator Al Gossett rushed out of the station waving his arms and shouting. Gossett had just received word that the floodwater had loosened the girder bridge at Prairie Creek from its moorings and had moved it a foot out of line. In another few seconds the locomotive’s tall driving wheels would have been speeding Number Eleven toward a possible rendezvous with calamity.\footnote{Washington Democrat, March 28, 1913.}

The dislocation of the Prairie Creek bridge, of course, added Washington to the scores of cities and towns across the
upper Ohio Valley that were almost totally isolated. In the meantime the effort to prevent destruction of the fill and bridges in the White River bottomland continued. It was almost as though the ninety or so men deployed along the fill were waging war against the churning water. Their ammunition in the struggle was sand poured into bags and packed into the resultant gaps whenever the water made a successful assault on the earthen embankment. Keeping them supplied with that ammunition through the afternoon and evening of March 27 was a short work train that moved back and forth between the battle area and a sandpit just west of the shops where other men were feverishly preparing the sandbags. Providing power for the train was Locomotive Number 401.25

Built for the O&M by the Rhode Island Locomotive Works in 1890, the 401 and its sister locomotive, Number 400, comprised the parent B&O's E-25 class of Consolidations. The 401 had slide valves, fifty-one-inch driving wheels, and weighed 121,800 pounds. It operated at 156 pounds of steam pressure and exerted a tractive force of 25,000 pounds. By 1913 the 401—a small machine even by standards of the early twentieth century—had become a switching locomotive, seldom straying from the yards in Washington. It was equipped with footboards on both the pilot beam and tender, and mounted on the tender was an oil-burning backup light that was almost identical to the headlight that rested atop the smokebox26 (see Figure 4).

The night was dark and the wind was cold,
And the swift flowing water, its horrors lent,
As bravely over the trestle at Old Blue Hole,
Our daring men on duty went.27

At 10:30 on the evening of March 27 the battle between workmen and the raging floodwater continued at full tilt. Residents on high ground at Maysville, a mile to the south of the fill (and a one-time canal station), could see the flickering of many lanterns bobbing back and forth along the fill and hear the dull roar of water rushing through the pilings and timbers of the Blue Hole trestle.28 They also could doubtless see the

28 Unless otherwise indicated, all information about the events of the evening of March 27, 1913, at Blue Hole and the surrounding area was taken from the Washington Democrat, March 28, 1913, and the Washington Gazette, April 4, 1913.
Shortly before 10:45 the 401 pushed the work train—by that time comprising three boxcars—across the trestle to a point near the dislocated Prairie Creek bridge. It was the sixth trip the train had made from the sandpit since midafternoon, and in addition to hundreds of sandbags it carried an undisclosed number of shopmen who had answered calls to work on the stricken fill. Observing the operation were Carlos G. Stevens, trainmaster of the B&OSW's Illinois Division (Washington to East St. Louis); Daniel L. Shaffer, general yardmaster at Washington; and Clifford McLemore, night yardmaster.

A few minutes before 11:00 p.m., after the last sandbags had been removed from the train, a decision was made—probably by Stevens—to return to the sandpit. Stevens, Shaffer, and McLemore climbed into the cab of the 401 while (one may assume) fireman Reason Jackson rammed his scoop into the coal pile, opened the fire door, and heaved the black combustibles into the firebox. Engineer Theodore Gharst, who the day before had celebrated his thirty-eighth birthday, reversed the
Stephenson valve gear, released the engine brake, and slowly opened the throttle. When saturated (i.e., nonsuperheated) steam made its way into the cylinders, the locomotive, running backward, tugged gently at the three-car train. Riding alone in the first boxcar was Otto McClellan, one of the shopmen who had been recruited to work on the fill. In the third car were twenty other workmen, and standing on the footboard of the 401's tender was switchman Daniel Tucker.29

As the tender of the 401 approached Blue Hole, Gharst closed the throttle and set the brake. Stevens wanted to talk with the bridge carpenter who had been observing the trestle. Because of the roar of the water raging through the piles and timbers, conversation must not have been easy, but the carpenter shouted that the structure was perfectly safe. The men in the cab of the 401 were not entirely persuaded and agreed among themselves that this would be their last trip across the thirty-eight-year-old trestle.

29The date of Gharst's birth was related to the author in the autumn of 1978 by the engineer's daughter, Adeline Gharst Wirts.
Gharst again released the brake and opened the throttle. Standing at the opening between the locomotive cab and tender on the left (downstream) side of the deck, doubtless peering down at the rushing water, was Stevens. Shaffer was standing directly behind the trainmaster. McLemore was standing beside Jackson—presumably on the left (fireman's) side of the cab—between Stevens and Shaffer and the backhead of the locomotive. Tucker clung to the grab rail on the tender above the footboard with one hand; a flickering lantern must have dangled from the other. The eight driving wheels of the 401 began to turn. The beam from the locomotive's backup light pierced the darkness and cast an eerie glow over the water that was cascading through the trestle.

Just one more trip and they were done,
They thought as back over the trestle they crept,
Two [actually three] cars of men, pulled by the old 401,
And faithful Dan Tucker on the engine [tender] step.31

First the tender moved onto the trestle. Tucker's eyes probably were fixed on the two ribbons of steel that reached into the darkness and glistened in the yellowish glow of the 401's backup light. Because of the rushing water it is doubtful that he could have heard the muffled exhaust of the locomotive. Next the driving wheels of the 401 passed on to the trestle, and after that the spoked leading truck.

Then it happened.

Without warning—perhaps a preliminary sway—timbers began to split, pilings to snap. The initial collapse of the Blue Hole trestle came at a point between the locomotive and the tender, causing the two main components of the 401 to close like a jackknife. Before the tender could smash into the wooden cab, Stevens leaped into the water. Still clinging to the grab rail above the footboard, Tucker was hurled in the air, his feet above his head. As the locomotive splashed into the water on the downstream side of the trestle, he continued to grip the rail. While the water lashed at the remnants of the 284-foot trestle—it did not complete its conquest until the next morning—the 401 slid from view, was carried some thirty feet downstream by the current, and settled on its right side in more than twenty feet of water.

30 Washington Democrat, April 26, 1913.
31 Donaldson, "Tragedy at Blue Hole."
In the Flood of 1913

Into the water, these men were thrown,
With each his own battle to fight,
The water closed over them with its awful moan,
And the struggle was on, between right and might.32

Pulled by the suction of the sinking locomotive, Stevens went many feet under the water, struggled to the surface, and grabbed a piece of trestle timber that was floating downstream. Fearing that the current was drawing him toward the main channel of White River, he let loose of the timber and through the darkness swam to a drift of limbs and branches. The drift proved no refuge, for the trainmaster again found himself being sucked beneath the water. Then, as he felt his strength ebbing away, he was propelled back to the surface. At that point he glimpsed the outline of a row of treetops protruding from the water. The treetops were adjacent to Hawkins Creek, more than a half-mile south of the B&OSW fill. He grabbed a limb, planted a foot in the crotch of a small tree, and began to shout for help.

Tucker meanwhile was waging his own struggle for survival. Still clinging to the 401’s tender, Tucker plunged into the swirling water headfirst, stayed with the tender until it hit bottom, then struggled to the surface where he collided with a trestle timber. He grabbed the timber and was floating downstream when another timber jarred him loose. He latched on to yet another timber, only to be knocked loose a second time. After slipping several feet under the water, he made his way back to the surface where he spotted a large flat object that was floating nearby—possibly the door of a boxcar—and pulled himself atop it. Then, like Stevens, he feared that the current was moving him toward the main channel of the river. Paddling frantically with his hands, he managed to change the course of his conveyance and through the darkness sighted treetops. Again like Stevens, he had reached the vicinity of Hawkins Creek. Wet and cold, the shivering switchman grabbed a limb and climbed into a tree. He made voice contact with Stevens, and the two men stepped up their cries for help.

Hearing the cries, residents of Maysville organized search parties, moved out in small boats across the flooded landscape, and some three hours after collapse of the trestle rescued Stevens and Tucker. There were no signs of Shaffer, McLemore, Gharst, and Jackson.

32 Ibid.
Back on the fill meanwhile another act of the Blue Hole drama had played out. When the 401 began its plunge into the depths of the hole at a few minutes past 11:00 p.m., it remained coupled to the first boxcar of the work train long enough to cause the car to overturn. Although one of its doors may have broken loose and provided a raft for Tucker, the width of the fill at track level was sufficient to prevent the car from tumbling into the water. Sparks from the stricken locomotive set the car afire, and the resultant flames illumined the area around Blue Hole for the next two hours. Fortunately the sole occupant of the car, Otto McClellan, escaped with minor injuries. The remaining two cars of the work train stayed on the rails, and the twenty men in the last of those cars were unscathed.

As might be expected, the shock resulting from the demise of the 401 and the men in its cab sapped the workmen on the fill of any incentive to continue the battle against the churning water. Collapse of the Blue Hole trestle, moreover, had cut off the approximately seventy men toiling to the west of the trestle from their supply of sandbags. The great overbearing concern of the men thus became to get off the fill, the more so since many of them feared in the aftermath of what had happened to the trestle that the entire embankment might now wash away. There seemed only one path of escape: along the fill to the White River bridge and thence to the town of Wheatland two miles beyond.
In the Flood of 1913

Thus, while Stevens and Tucker were awaiting rescue, the workmen on the fill, led by foreman John H. Jackman, began to trek westward—destination, Wheatland. After proceeding a mile from the dislocated Prairie Creek girder bridge, the men approached the two-span truss bridge over White River. Jackman ordered the men to halt. He explained that he wanted to inspect the bridge before leading them across. Then, before the inspection could begin, the men heard the ghastly sounds of twisting and snapping steel, cracking crossties, and finally a mighty roar and crash. The relentless floodwater had claimed the White River bridge and isolated the men, several of them terror-stricken, on the fill.

Some of the workmen now pondered another avenue of escape. Five hundred yards east of the fallen river bridge a switch track angled away from the B&OSW main. It led to a grain elevator at the foot of Tom's Hill, a rise some five hundred yards north of the fill. Although completely surrounded by water, the hill was in no danger of being inundated. Equally enticing, the residence of E. Ervin Padgett stood near the top of the hill, and the men could see the light of kerosene lamps inside the house. A few feet from the turnout, to be sure, the switch track was under water, and there was no way to ascertain how deep the water might be farther along. There was, moreover, the matter of the water's current and also the blackness of the night. Approximately half of the men concluded that the risk of trying to push through the water to Tom's Hill outweighed that of staying on the fill and awaiting rescue. Thirty-two of their co-workers, including eight black men from Wheatland, decided otherwise.

And so the intrepid thirty-two, led by Jackman and Charles Denson, waded single file into the water. Unable to see where they were walking, they relied on one of the submerged rails to guide their steps. The water was cold and eventually reached the shoulders of the shorter men. Fortunately the current presented no hazard, although the men stumbled repeatedly in holes between the rails of the seldom-used switch. For perhaps thirty minutes they pressed on through the water until at last they reached the hill, then scrambled up to the Padgett house and pounded on the front door. The Padgetts welcomed the cold and drenched men, built a huge fire in the stone fireplace, and served hot coffee. Meanwhile the telephone wire from the Padgett house was transmitting the news that all of the men who had been working on the fill were safe, thus squelching a rumor that had swept Washington that 150 men
PILE DRIVER AT WORK REBUILDING THE TRESTLE OVER BLUE HOLE

REBUILDING THE TRESTLE OVER WHITE RIVER
had perished as a result of the collapse of the trestle at Blue Hole. Rescue by rowboat came the following day for the men at Tom's Hill and also for those who had remained on the fill.

The floodwater crested in the Daviess-Knox County bottomland on March 28 and began to subside the following day. Even before the water began to fall, less than twenty-four hours after the 401 made its plunge to the bottom of Blue Hole, a pile-driver was pushed from the shops to the hole where, despite the fearsome current, bridge carpenters began the task of building a new trestle. Three days later another pile-driver, borrowed from the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, arrived at the west bank of White River and set about sinking pilings for a temporary trestle across that river. (The CB&Q machine moved from East St. Louis to Lawrenceville, Illinois, over the B&OSW, up the Big Four to Ridge Farm, Illinois, eastward on the Toledo, St. Louis and Western to Linden, Indiana, down the Monon to Gosport, from Gosport to Vincennes over the Indianapolis and Vincennes, thence to White River on the B&OSW.) On April 6 the new trestle over Blue Hole was opened to traffic, that over White River on April 17.33

Meanwhile an almost continuous search for the bodies of the four men who had gone down with the 401 turned up nothing. Professional divers hired by the B&OSW scanned the bottom of Blue Hole and found no trace of the missing men. Then, on April 20, Raymond Leonard, walking with trainmaster Stevens near Hawkins Creek (looking for the tree in which Stevens had found refuge on the night of March 27), spied a piece of cloth protruding from the sand. A tug at the cloth exposed the decomposed body of Reason Jackson. Indications were that Jackson had been crushed and scalded when the 401's tender jackknifed into the wooden cab. Later that same day four boys were moving about the area above Hawkins Creek looking for pools of water that might contain stranded fish when one of the youths saw a hand protruding from the sand. It was the body of Clifford McLemore. On a finger was a ring denoting the night yardmaster's membership in the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. Like Jackson, McLemore had died when the 401's tender smashed into the cab.34

Two days later, April 22, a band of 156 men recruited at the nearby B&OSW shops assembled near Hawkins Creek,

33 Washington Democrat, March 29, 31, April 7, 18, 1913; Vincennes Capital, April 3, 1913.
34 Washington Democrat, April 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 21, 26, 1913; Washington Gazette, April 11, 25, 1913.
formed a line, and with six-foot metal prods began probing the sandy bottomland. Not far from the point where McLemore's body had been found a workman pushed his prod far into the sand, felt something strange, and called for assistance. When after considerable difficulty the loose sand was scooped away, the large body of Daniel Shaffer, remarkably preserved and still wrapped in his heavy overcoat, was exposed. In one of the pockets of Shaffer's trousers was a rosary and a gold crucifix. The general yardmaster had died of drowning. A few hours later the prod of another workman disclosed the body of Theodore Gharst. The dead engineer was under five feet of loose, very wet sand, and the construction of a circular coffer dam twenty feet in diameter—and several hours of pumping water and scooping sand—were required before the body could be removed. Inside a pocket was Gharst's watch. It had run for forty-five minutes after collapse of the trestle. Like Shaffer, Gharst had drowned.  

That same day, April 22, the B&OSW restored through passenger service between Cincinnati and St. Louis, but not through the White River bottomland. At the foot of Main Street in Cincinnati, passengers boarded the river steamer City of Louisville, then cruised down the Ohio to Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Transferred to waiting trains, they moved over B&OSW rails to North Vernon and Louisville, thence over the Louisville and Nashville to St. Louis. Near the end of the month the

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35 Washington Democrat, April 23, 26, 1913; Washington Gazette, April 25, 1913.
B&OSW resumed eight-hour passenger service between Cincinnati and St. Louis over its own rails.\(^{36}\)

The last scene of the Blue Hole drama played in the first days of June, 1913: the retrieval of the 401. Fortunately the locomotive had fallen into the comparatively shallow northwest corner of Blue Hole and, when the flood passed, was lying in barely ten feet of water. At length, workmen lashed a huge chain around the boiler and frame of the 401 and to the chain attached a long cable. Next they pulled the cable far down the main track toward Prairie Creek and connected it to a pair of locomotives, probably Consolidations. After several snapplings of the cable, the churning driving wheels of the two locomotives dragged the cableless and grimy hulk from the water and to the foot of the fill. From that point a wrecker was able to lift it to the rails. The tender was never recovered. The locomotive was slowly pulled into the shops where it was restored, given a new tender, and returned to service. Retirement of the venerable Consolidation came twenty years later in 1933.\(^{37}\)

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36 Washington Democrat, April 22, May 3, 1913. 
37 Ibid., June 4, 1913; Washington Gazette, June 6, 1913. For the retirement date of Number 401 see notation on Figure 4.
THE 401 BEFORE THE FLOOD

THE 401 AFTER THE FLOOD AND RECONDITIONING
In the Flood of 1913

In the large perspective of events in the upper Ohio Valley during the great flood of 1913, the incident at Blue Hole trestle on the night of March 27 did not loom particularly large. Disasters elsewhere in the region were far more devastating. The high water and resultant fires that ravaged Dayton, Ohio, for example, claimed ninety-six lives and gutted large areas of the city.\(^{38}\) Eleven people perished and hundreds of houses were destroyed or damaged when the Wabash raged through Peru in northern Indiana.\(^{39}\) Still, the tragedy at Blue Hole etched itself into the consciousness of the people of the surrounding area—particularly into the consciousness of the men who operated trains across the White River bottomland for the next half-century and beyond. Scarcely an engineman or trainman who has rolled back and forth across the Blue Hole trestle (its timber and pilings now sheathed with reinforced concrete and strengthened with rock ballast that protrudes above the water’s surface) from 1913 to the present has not known the main points of the tragedy. It seems fair to say that from time to time some of them have peered down into the murky water and pondered the fate of Gharst, Jackson, McLemore, and Shaffer. As Edward Hungerford wrote in reference to the four men in his history of the Baltimore and Ohio, "All deaths of heroism are not those of the battlefield. The railroad has its own roster of honor."\(^{40}\)

We who remain, sadly mourn their death,
As we think of the victory, which by Death was won,
But to the heart-broken families thus bereft,
Just remember, "What is God's will shall be done."\(^{41}\)

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\(^{38}\) Henry, Floods of 1913 in the Rivers of the Ohio and Lower Mississippi Valleys, 50-53.


\(^{40}\) Hungerford, Story of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 288.

\(^{41}\) Donaldson, "Tragedy at Blue Hole." The Blue Hole tragedy also produced a song. The author's stepfather, Harley A. Wallace, has recalled two of the verses:

A mother waits now for her son
And a wife for her husband too,
But they went down with the Four-aught-one,
While midnight skies were blue.

Down with their iron steed they sank,
For duty called them there,
Their cries rang out from bank to bank,
All in the midnight air.