



# Ashtabula River Railroad Disaster

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

## Introduction

On December 29, 1876, the Pacific Express, a train comprised of two locomotives and 11 railcars, fell into the Ashtabula River when the iron Howe Truss model bridge collapsed, sending all cars but the lead locomotive 1,000 feet below. The wooden cars soon caught fire and would continue to burn into the next day when the fire department was ordered to help the wounded to safety, rather than put out the fire. Of the 159 passengers on board, 92 died, including famous gospel singer/writer Philip Bliss, making it the deadliest train wreck in United States history until 1918. Many of the dead were unable to be recognized or even recovered. Despite being only 100 yards away from the station, response time to the wreck was slowed by a heavy snowstorm. It was determined that several factors played a part in the bridge collapse: faulty construction, a lack of a careful inspection by an engineer, stress on the bridge, and cold weather.

## Important Dates

- 1865: The Ashtabula River Bridge is completed using the Howe Truss model, adapted to be made out of iron.
- December 29, 1876: The Pacific Express falls into the Ashtabula River after the bridge collapses.
- January 12, 1877: The Ohio Legislature appoints an investigative committee to determine the cause of the bridge collapse.
- January 18, 1877: A wooden Howe Truss bridge is completed to replace the former iron bridge.
- 1883: Amasa Stone, designer of the collapsed Ashtabula River Bridge, commits suicide.

## Suggested Search Strategies

- 1865: The Ashtabula River Bridge is completed using the Howe Truss model, adapted to be made out of iron.
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## Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[Horror of Horrors](#)" *National Republican* (Washington, D.C.), December 30, 1876, Image 1, col. 8.
- "[Railway Disaster](#)" *Stark County Democrat* (Canton, OH), January 4, 1877, Image 5, col. 6.
- "[The Disaster!](#)" *Ashtabula Telegraph* (Ashtabula, OH), January 5, 1877, Image 2, col. 1-5.
- "[The Ashtabula Disaster](#)" *Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, OH), January 11, 1877, Image 1, col. 7.
- "[An Ashtabula Incident](#)" *Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, OH), January 18, 1877, Image 1, col. 8.
- "[The Verdict of the Coroner's Jury](#)" *Ashtabula Telegraph* (Ashtabula, OH), March, 9, 1877, Image 3, col. 6-7.
- "[Amasa Stone](#)" *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), May 18, 1883, Image 1, col. 5.