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## Stories of Jumbo Death in St. Thomas Have Been Distorted for 66 Years

Fred R. Arnum, Retired Veteran Train Dispatcher, Relates the True Facts; Circus Official Ignored Instructions After Being Told That Freight Train Was Coming

Jumbo, the giant Barnum Circus elephant, was not killed trying to protect his little companion elephant; and the so-called companion elephant was not called Tom Thumb, but Baby. The engineer on the locomotive with which Jumbo had his fatal argument was not a man named Phipps, but was Billy Burnip, who some years later lost his life in the California earthquake.

The above are just a few of the facts about Jumbo and his accidental death in the east yards of the old Grand Trunk Railway on the evening of September 15, 1885. They come from a man who should know what he is talking about, for he is one of the 38 official witnesses who was in New York City for two weeks, giving evidence at the enquiry. Incidentally he is the only one of those 38 railway witnesses still living.

He is Fred R. Arnum, 54 Gladstone avenue, St. Thomas, retired Grand Trunk and Pere Marquette train dispatcher, and one of the oldest Masons in Canada.

Ever since Jumbo's death, thousands and thousands of words have been written and printed about the local tragedy that made the international headlines, and thousands of what have been printed and been wrong. Very recently, the Jumbo story cropped up again in the Toronto press in connection with an application for pension. The Toronto press even reported the wrong year—1883, instead of 1885.

The Times-Journal sought out Mr. Arnum to get the true story and would now respectfully suggest,

that readers file it away for future reference when other erroneous stories about Jumbo's death appear.

Mr. Arnum was night operator and agent at the old Grand Trunk Railway depot at the time of Jumbo's death. He has good reason to remember what occurred, for about 7:30 o'clock on that fateful evening, the transportation agent for the Barnum Circus came to his window at the depot and asked if there was any westbound train out of Buffalo before the local train that subsequently became known as "Old Granny." Mr. Arnum told the circus official that a westbound freight was due about 8:15 o'clock, and he also instructed the circus official not to start any loading operations until after 9:55 o'clock, when "Old Granny" was due, and also not to start loading until a railway crew had been sent up to the circus area, off Woodworth avenue. His instructions were heard and witnessed by the day agent, a man named Stewart.

### Ignored Instructions

Mr. Arnum said that those instructions were ignored and that the loading of the animals was started shortly afterward. The exact time that Jumbo crashed into the locomotive of the westbound freight train was 8:18 o'clock, but that was not the time of the big elephant's death. Jumbo did not expire until about four o'clock the next morning. His huge body was dragged off the tracks and lay on the embankment slope.

The locomotive with which Jumbo collided was No. 783, not No. 239, as was reported two or three years ago in a story of the tragedy in the London, Ont., press.

Billy Burnip was the engineer; Jack Forrest was the fireman; John Thompson was the conductor and William Teat and Billy Alger were the brakemen. It was a light freight train of only about 19 cars.

Matthew Scott, Jumbo's keeper, Mr. Arnum told The Times-Journal, did not follow the route he was supposed to follow, in leading the elephants to their cars. He had a section of fencing along the north side of the railway right-of-way, on what was then the Mann Farm, torn down, and he took the elephants through that opening and up the railway embankment. Jumbo was just being taken to his freight car, when the westbound freight, drawn by Locomotive No. 783, bore down. The headlights on the old locomotive were not the bright darkness-piercing lights of today and there were not many airbrakes in operation then. The result was that the engineer could not bring his train to a stop in time to avoid the collision.

### Knocked Off Stack

Now here's some interesting in-

## Death of Jumbo Brought Publicity to St. Thomas



This old photograph of the dead Jumbo lying on the railroad embankment was taken on the morning of September 16, 1885. The man leaning against the huge body with arm on a foreleg was Matthew Scott, Jumbo's keeper.

formation: As Jumbo saw his danger, he reared up on his huge hind legs in defiant mood and slashed at the locomotive with his powerful trunk. That swipe of his trunk had such force behind it that it literally slashed off the smoke-stack on the locomotive. The next second, one of the cylinder heads on the locomotive struck one of Jumbo's tusks, driving it back into his head.

As for the small elephant that was with Jumbo being called Tom Thumb, Mr. Arnum said that he had known the little fellow from boyhood and the elephant was always called "Baby." Tom Thumb was one of the midgets exhibited by Barnum, a tiny little man and not a tiny little elephant.

### Eight Cords of Wood

Jumbo's big carcass was skinned, where it lay on the embankment, and the bones were removed. All the flesh was burned in huge funeral pyres. It took eight cords of dry hardwood, supplied by the late Charles Locke, to burn up that flesh. Burying the flesh was suggested but was not permitted. Peters, a leading butcher of St.

Thomas at that time, was engaged to cut up the carcass, and was assisted by a man named Hammond.

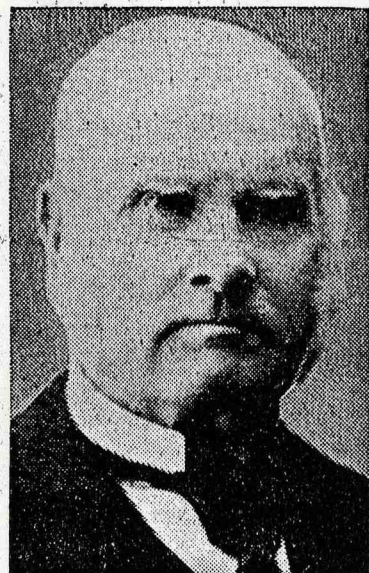
The official enquiry that took place in New York City lasted two weeks brought out a tremendous amount of evidence, including that given by Mr. Arnum, and all of which should still be filed away in some dusty archives.

Six years after the tragedy, Mr. Arnum was a train dispatcher on the railroad—a position he held for many years. Today he is the oldest retired dispatcher in the district, if not in Ontario. He was quite sure there wasn't anybody on that freight train, on the night of September 15, 1885, who could use that as a timemark for obtaining an old age pension.

# Recounts Early Stories Of the Talbot District

For Mrs. Richard Bobier, of 80 Myrtle street, current events of this stirring period of world history and of her own community are the general topic of conversation of her friends, but for those who are interested in earlier days she can make pioneer history come alive, and then one walks with the early settlers and their immediate successors, for Mrs. Bobier's keen memory goes back far into the past and brings to mind also the happenings of her father's and her grandfather's day as they were told to her.

Born at Iona on May 8, 1860, and living later on the Talbot road west of Port Talbot, from where she moved to St. Thomas just a few years ago, Mrs. Bobier is closely linked with the early



**JAMES MITCHELL**  
Youngest Son of Mr. and Mrs. John Mitchell

history of this district. It was in 1798 that her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. John Mitchell, came from Ireland and settled at a place called Lewiston in the southwestern part of present Ontario, where her grandfather had a store. No family came with them, for their eldest son had been left in Ireland to succeed to entailed property, coming later to this country, and they had been sadly bereaved on the way of their second son, who had died at sea.

Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell remained at their first homestead until the time of the war of 1812-14, and one of the stories that her father recounted for Mrs. Bobier was that before the battle near Moraviantown at which Tecumseh was killed, his father had opened a gate to let this valiant Indian ally of the British and his men pass through. He told her, too, that after the battle his father had been at the place of the conflict and that he said that Tecumseh had been buried like the other dead and had not been mutilated by the enemy as one rumor stated.

Another story handed down in the family about that troubled period of history concerned the Talbot district. Mrs. Bobier's grandmother was at the home of Mrs. Mahlon Burwell when it was raided by the enemy, who plundered many homes in the district at that time, leaving the settlers with very little. Some of the raiders were said to have been disguised as Indians. When Mrs. Mitchell saw them coming, she ran upstairs to her baby daughter (later Mrs. Stuart Bissell, of Fingal), and then jumped out of the window in terror as she was followed. However, the "Indian" came and helped her up from where she had dropped and told her not to be afraid: "No kill him squaw."

ing his father's advice, and moved to Iona. He had lived on the Talbot Road for many years, however, and later told his interested children much of the early history of the district.

Among other things, his daughter heard him tell of how on many a night their kitchen floor was covered with prospective settlers stopping there on their way to Port Talbot to apply for land. They would come that far before night to be able to reach Port Talbot in the morning since that was the time that Col. Talbot would transact business.

## Port Talbot

As a child, Mrs. Bobier often drove with her father to Port Talbot, a favorite drive for the family, and she remembers well seeing through the old pioneer home there and being shown old logs in the wall on the inside of the building. She remembers, too, some of the old furniture of the home. And she knew well a sleigh of Col. Talbot's and a carriage which her father bought and which the family used for years.

The carriage was quite an elaborate vehicle drawn by two horses and it had leather curtains, including one which hung down in front with holes for the reins and a "window." Her father always drove with this curtain up, however. It was a large carriage in which six could ride and in its later days, the top was cut off and proved a roomy playhouse for the family.

It was natural that Mrs. Bobier heard much of the early days in the Talbot district and among other things she learned of Col. Talbot's bitter resentment at the changes made by his nephew, Col. Airey, while he was away on a visit to the Old Country, and how he refused to reside in his altered home after he returned.

Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell also knew Col. Airey and Mrs. Bobier's father told her of the Sunday morning when Col. Airey was leaving for England. He stopped outside the church just as the service was ended to say "Good-bye" to Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell and is said to have told the former that he expected to be back in a year. Time went by, however, and he did not return. History tells instead of the way in which his distinguished career developed in England.

## In Early Book

When Harriet Mitchell was married to Richard Bobier, she married into a family which was closely linked with the early history of the Talbot settlement, for the "John B." referred to in Mrs. Anna Jameson's well-known book on pioneer Canada, "Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada," was her father-in-law. It was John Bobier whom Col. Talbot arranged to have drive Mrs. Jameson on her two-day journey from Port Talbot to Chatham, and Mrs. Jameson gives a lengthy account of this respected young farmer and of what he told her of living conditions in that district.

The same John Bobier used often to drive Col. Talbot himself, Mrs. Bobier was told, taking his sturdy waggon, and she was told that in making arrangements for a trip Col. Talbot would say: "Be sure and take your axe, John."

That is many years ago and a journey along the Talbot Road is not the undertaking today that it was in Col. Talbot's time. But it is good to hear of those early residents who once traveled it and who were among that good company of early settlers who helped to make the interesting and fine history of the Talbot Settlement.

The plundered settlers were left practically destitute. Among other things the raiders ripped up the feather beds, scattered the feathers to the winds and carried away their loot in the covering used as sacks. Mrs. Mitchell happened to save a small piece of blue print, about two yards long, which she divided with Mrs. Burwell.

## Long Friendships

Mrs. Burwell's friendship with Mrs. Mitchell was continued with the next generation also, and in later years it was familiar to see her walking through Mrs. James Mitchell's yard, carrying her knitting wool in a little basket on her arm and working as she walked and talked. One day, when young Harriet Mitchell (Mrs. Bobier) came home from school, she found that her mother was not at home and was told that Mrs. Burwell had died and that her mother had been sent for to prepare her for burial, a tender service on the part of a friend in those days, which Mrs. Burwell had requested before her death.

But that was many years later. Going back to the pioneer settlers, Mr. and Mrs. John Mitchell moved to this part of the Talbot district from their first homestead around the period of the war, Mr. Mitchell buying a farm just west of Fingal on the Talbot Road. Altogether, there were ten children in their family, eight of them born in Canada, Mrs. Bobier's father, the youngest, being born in 1818 after they came to Fingal. Mrs. John Mitchell died and Mr. Mitchell married again.

James Mitchell married in 1844 and he and his wife resided at the homestead which was later divided for the two families, and they continued there until 1852, when, on the death of the father, Mr. Mitchell sold the farm, follow-



*Louise Lachey went by car over this bridge in 1942*

