

[Page 63 - The S & L Train Wreck at Mira, 1903](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 68](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1995/6/1

A diver stands on the barge, while another worker stands on the boiler of the now completely submerged locomotive. bound from Louisbourg with a long train of empty coal cars. It was crewed by Charles J. MacDonald, conductor, James Parsons, engineer, Charles Dickson, fireman, George Wadden, head brakeman and Harold Cann, end brakeman. The powerful locomotive was under a full head of steam as it emerged from a rock cut and rounded a curve on its approach to the Mira River. Engineer Parsons and fireman Dickson, from their vantage point high in the cab, could see the open section of the draw bridge and immediately made frantic efforts to stop the train. Unlike today's rolling stock with air brakes and extra assists, safety devices were few and far between in the early 20th century. Parsons blew the whistle. One of the greatest minds in science found Nova Scotia to be fertile ground for the development of their ideas. The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture is working hard to provide the same environment for today's students. We have one objective - to provide Nova Scotians with every possible opportunity for success in learning. Our future depends on it. The Department of Education and Culture whistle for extra brakes, threw the locomotive into reverse, and applied sand to the drive wheels. By the time the train entered the first span, it had slowed to a speed of about four miles an hour. Nonetheless it was apparent that a disaster was unavoidable. When the train was about half way across the bridge and the pony wheels of the engine were just going over the abutment, fireman Dickson leaped from the cab and clung to a girder. The engine plunged into the icy water, about 25 feet deep at mid-stream. The cab broke off and crashed into the river. Three empty cars followed in quick succession. The conductor and brakeman, who were traveling further back in the train, ran to the river bank. A small dory was launched from the Alameda in an attempt to rescue James Parsons. Crew members Angus McDonald and Ignatius Campbell quickly recovered his body floating nearby, but efforts to revive him failed. Dr. McKeen arrived shortly thereafter and determined that he had been killed instantly by the impact. A veteran railroader, well liked by his fellow trainmen, Parsons had joined the S&L about a year earlier after a career with the Grand Trunk railway. Strong tidal currents and the enormous weight of the equipment made cleaning up the wreck a tough job. In charge were C.S. Clayton and John Leaman, who at that time was fire chief in Glace Bay. With the help