

Imagine, for a moment, a train engineer looking ahead and seeing a cow splayed leisurely across the track. How long, after pulling the brake, would it take for the train to stop? In Medora, in 1948, it wasn't quite enough. On that cool but sunny day, the freight train approached, coming from the east. Down the gentle, arching slope. Going 40 miles, say 60 kilometers an hour. My slide rule handy, I figure that, it'd be a good half mile, till every wheel screeched to a halt, saving the cow, and the company their time and damage.



A cow on the track could cause quite a bit of damage. Medora - 1948.

Unfortunately, this story ends with one less cow and rail cars scattered off the tracks. If this was all, it'd be a fairly short story. But two fine men gave us more, because they cared to wax poetic. Let's listen first to CJ Barnes, speak of that fateful day.

“There was a commotion around Old Medora, When a freight train spill, made our hearts stand still. Sure we were, that a bomb had burst. Now, we know, a drowsy cow it was, that laid her weary bones upon the track. When swift down the grade, from where the junk yards lay, swept a freight, loaded with grain. With danger near, the cow cocked an ear, but alas it was too late. The engine sped on, till at the station house lawn, a car from the rails did leap. Whilst fifteen more, with a deafening roar, piled up in a shapeless heap. Two days and a night, with little respite, crews laboured while trucks gathered grain. Till Saturday night, when the place was set right, with men working shovels and cranes, and our hapless cow,

casting her eye from the sky, did moo us all a good night.”

Wonderful as this account is, another gentleman, hearing the news, thought the cow's perspective needed to be heard.

Here's, Tom Rickard in the Deloraine Times and Star.

“Dear Mr. Barnes. I read with glee, the verse you wrote, concerning me, that lazy cow so hastily dispatched, by the big choochoo, to the Land of Moo. The day was warm, I had feasted fine. On luscious grass with my fellow kind. Since the day was warm, I drowsy grew, and settled on a place to chew; to rest my bones and make some milk, for good old Farmer Jones. Right on the track, while breezes blew, and pesky flies were few. I awoke in haste, now tattered, torn, in a place so hot and cruel. But down came St. Peter, in the nick of time, to lift me to this bliss. I live today with Susie and Rover, in a pasture of finest clover. And, St. Peter, Paul and the Maccabees, come find me when it's tea. They need their cream and I their pail, just as we do down there. Till again we meet, where the sinners are few, in the land that we call Moo.”

Drowsy Cow was inspired by a story written by Ken Storie for Vantage Points 5.



The danger presented by livestock on the tracks inspired Charles Babbage to invent the “cow-catcher” in the 1830's.