

POINT OF IMPACT

The following articles about our namesake, Dr. Joseph Kalbfus, are reprinted from *Steppin' Out in Kinzua Country* magazine May and June 2014 publications. Some graphic liberties have been taken because the pictures in the copy of the original articles were indistinguishable. The pictures from www.collectorsweekly.com of the Dodge Touring Automobile and the locomotive engine from www.catskillarchive.com are representative of the vehicles in use circa 1919.

Point of Impact

By Scott Canfield

Author's note: Ever since I had heard about the car and train collision that took Dr. Joseph Kalbfus' life I had to look into this to see just how this could have happened. I don't believe anyone in present times has looked at it to the depth that I have.

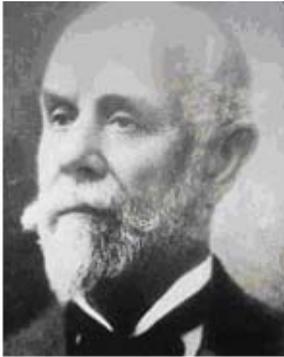
The clock neared 12:15 on that sunny Sunday, August 10, 1919 as the soft-top touring Dodge Automobile neared the Saybrook Crossing.

"C'mon Joe, it's Sunday and I'm tired. Can't we go back into Warren and call it a day?" inquired E. W. Kelly.

"Hang with me, Woody. It's just up ahead. I know it is." Joe Kalbfus replied. Kelly capitulated. "OK. But only if it doesn't take much longer."



These words may have been similar to the last conversation spoken by the two men.



67 year old Joseph Kalbfus, a Harrisburg resident and the first secretary of the Pennsylvania Game Commission and one of its founding fathers, and E. W. Kelly, a Dubois resident and Superintendent of the Commission were scouting game lands for future reserves. Dr. Kalbfus was a noted woodsman, lawyer, and dentist very devoted to wildlife and its preservation. In another car about 200 yards ahead was Dr. C. B. Penrose of Philadelphia and John Phillips of Pittsburgh, both Game Protectors. None of the men could foresee the horrific accident that was about to occur.

Also approaching the (Saybrook) crossing was the Pennsylvania Railroad Express train No. 3914 consisting of the engine, coach, baggage car, and caboose. The train was reputed to be maxing out at a top speed of 60 mph as it approached Dr. Kalbfus' car. Without any warning and before anyone could realize what was happening, the train slammed full on square into the Dodge Automobile. The impact was so intense according to eyewitnesses that the car was smashed into kindling, tossed up and onto the engine and carried for a distance of about 800 feet before coming to a stop. The pilot (front mounted deflecting structure) of the train was bent upward. The car ahead of Dr. Kalbfus heard and saw nothing and continued on its way.



Now just a word of caution to our readers at this point: The following newspaper and eyewitness accounts of the accident are not for the faint of heart.

A witness for the Clearfield Progress testified that he saw the train a minute or two before it crashed at the crossing. He went on to say that the train was running at a high rate of speed and

easily passed him as he was driving at 45 mph. The Progress went to record the engineer's word when he stated that he never saw the car until the pilot of the engine was almost touching it!

As an eyewitness, L. H. Snap of Clarendon testified for the Warren Evening Mirror that he was looking down the track toward the crossing when he heard a great crash. A huge cloud of dust arose and out of the cloud the body of a man was catapulted into the air. Then as the train emerged from the dust he could see an automobile wrapped about the front of the engine.

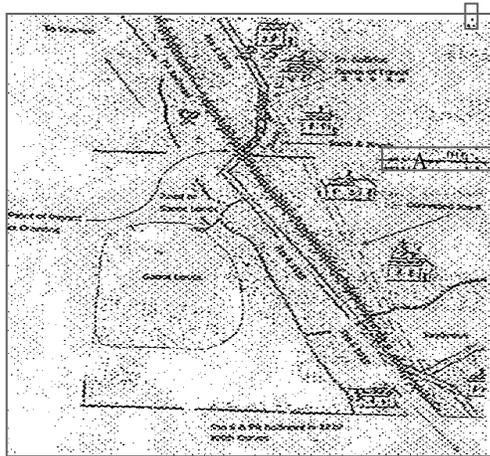
"The man who was ejected was obviously Dr. Kalbfus who landed to the side of the track and broke his back and legs inflicting instant death on him. I could see Mr. Kelly was pinned between the car and the engine and was badly crushed. He had many broken bones including both legs, his arm, and hand."

This second of a two part series of articles written by Scott Canfield and published in *Steppin' Out in Kinzua Country* magazine in May and June of 2014, included pictures of the crossing at which Dr. Kalbfus and Mr. Kelly had their fatal accident. Even though the pictures could not be reproduced with any recognizable clarity, the original diagram of the railway and adjacent property has been inserted into this reprint.

Point of Impact Final Thoughts

By Scott Canfield

In our May issue we told the account of the car and train collision that took the life of Dr. Joseph Kalbfus and E. W. Kelly. What I wasn't able to show you in that story was a diagram of the collision site and what route 6 looked like in 1919 and the route of travel of the two men. Since that time I was able to locate an 1878 map with the help of the great people in the assessment office of the Warren County Courthouse. Many thanks go to them for their assistance.



We described the dangerous Saybrook Crossing with its bank and brush that muted the sound of the train and blocked the view of Dr. Kalbfus and the train's engineer, but a picture is worth a thousand words and the diagram below will show that point of impact and the direction the men traveled to get there and the changes made to Rt. 6 after the collision.

The Game Lands the men were seeking were situated to the Southwest of the crossing. The men were most likely traveling south on Rt. 6 from Warren in order to have to cross the tracks. In comparison to traveling north from Sheffield, they would not have had to cross the tracks to reach the Game Lands unless they were heading back to Warren after viewing the Land which

most likely would have been toward the end of the day. Given that the collision occurred at 12:15, it is more likely the men were just starting their day, consequently they were headed south from Warren. A bit of information that still eludes us is the exact year was corrected and straightened out to eliminate the train crossing. The oldest map I had, showed it was changed by 1933. Sheffield Township had a map that showed it changed by 1931. Thanks to Bruce Zeigler at the Simpler Times Museum in Tidioute, he had a map showing it changed by 1927. This takes the window down to within probably seven years when you allow for those maps being drawn up about the year previous.

The 11878 map shows the road and crossing existed at least as early as 40 years prior to the accident, but was changed most probably within seven years afterwards. Though it was a known

fact that there were other accidents, no one knows for sure how many casualties there were. It is obvious that the powers to be, in the Railroad and Highway departments in 1919 knew the danger of the crossing and failed to act to save more lives.

In a final note we theorize about why the train was not heard previous to the approach of the crossing. In the May issue we told of how trains do not sound their whistles at rural crossings. We also cited the bank and brush. In addition, in order for the train to strike the car we pointed out that it had to be within 88 ft. or about five car lengths. This clearly shows that the train was already at the point of impact with Dr. Kalbfus' car. Had the train still been enroute and back any distance at all from the crossing, it's possible that the sound of the engine, the wheels on the track, and billowing black smoke may have served as a signal to Dr. Kalbfus. With sound or view of the train or warning whatsoever, Dr. Kalbfus and Mr. Kelly never even stood a chance!