

## The Wreck of the Old 97 - accompaniment

Work/Lewey



1. On a cold frosty morning in the month of September  
When the clouds were hanging low,  
97 pulled out of the Washington station  
Like an arrow shot out of a bow.
2. They handed him his orders in Munroe, Virginia  
Saying, "Steve, you're way behind time.  
This is not 38 but it's old 97,  
You must put her into Spencer on time"
3. Well, Steve he turned to the black and greasy fireman  
He said "Shovel on a little more coal  
And when we get to old White Oak Mountain  
You can watch old 97 roll."
4. It's a mighty long road from Lynchburg to Danville  
And it lies on a three mile grade.  
It was on that grade that he lost his air breaks  
You could see what a jump that he made.
5. He was coming down the grade doing 90 miles an hour  
When the whistle broke into a scream.  
They found him in the wreck with his hand on the throttle  
He was scalded to death by the steam.
6. The news was a-travelin' o'er the telegraph wire  
and this is what it said,  
"That brave engineer from Monroe Virginia  
Is a layin' in the graveyard dead."
7. Now you railroad wives come and take warning  
And this lesson you must learn:  
Never speak harsh words to your true loving husband  
He may leave you and never return.

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"The Wreck of the Old 97" was an American rail disaster involving the Southern Railway mail train officially known as the Fast Mail on September 27, 1903 while enroute from Monroe, Virginia, to Spencer, North Carolina. It was pulled by 4-6-0 locomotive 1102. The engineer was Joseph "Steve" Brody. The railway company was fined \$100 for every 30 minutes that the mail was delayed so mail trains were encouraged to proceed as fast as possible. Due to excessive speed the train derailed at the Stillhouse Trestle near Danville, Virginia where the train careened off the side of the bridge, killing eleven on board personnel and injuring seven others. The ballad was sung to the tune of "The Ship That Never Returned", written by Henry Clay Work in 1865. Originally, the lyrics were attributed to Fred Jackson Lewey and co-author Charles Noell.

Lewey claimed to have written the song the day after the accident, in which his cousin Albion Clapp was one of the two fireman killed. Throughout the 1920's a number of people claimed to have written the lyrics. Copyright ownership was eventually granted to the Victor Talking Machine Company by the US Supreme Court.

An account of both the incident and the song is included in Katie Letcher Lyle's book **Scalded to Death by the Steam**.