



Train at Hillsgrove

Feb. 19, 2020

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S
MUSEUM . . . while dusting

“Horrible Death of Woman” –
that was the headline on the
Sullivan Review issue of Oct. 14,
1909. The lady in the ensuing
story was married to a
descendant of the Fairchild

family involved in the argument of the placement of the Sullivan County seat after our formation in 1847. It was to be a three year ongoing manipulation by all corners of this county to then finally settle on Laporte for the location and is a story in and of itself, for another time. Meantime, here is the 1909 story of a woman:

“The most horrible accident which has happened in this section was the fatal burning last Thursday of Mrs. William Fairchild, who lived at the horse shoe curve, about a mile from town, her clothing catching fire while trying to extinguish flames started by a passing locomotive.

“Mrs. Fairchild was alone at her home on Thursday. Shortly before noon she discovered that a passing engine had started a fire in the dry grass and brush near the barn. Fearing that the flames would spread to the building, she started out with a pail of water and a broom to put the fire out.

“Just how her clothing caught fire will never be known. The first seen of the woman was when the neighbors, attracted by her screams, saw what resembled a big ball of fire flying across the field toward the house. With her clothing all ablaze and suffering untold agonies from the burns the woman ran until her strength gave out, then fell to the ground, her clothing setting fire to the dry grass around her.

“When neighbors, attracted by her screams, reached the unfortunate woman, it was found that practically all the clothing had been burned from her body, and the flesh so charred that it crumbled in the hands of those who assisted in carrying her to the house.

“Everything possible was done to allay the poor woman’s suffering until the arrival of a physician. Besides being terribly burned, she had inhaled the flames and although conscious, she was beyond all human aid. It was impossible to do anything except ease, to a certain extent, the awful pain, and wait for death to end her suffering, which came at about twenty minutes after four in the afternoon.”

The funeral was held on Sunday morning at the home of Rev. H.R. Wilkes of the Evangelical church with interment at the Cadwalder cemetery. Mrs. Fairchild was Anna K. (Hall) Fairchild, born 1856, so she’d have been 53 years of age. Her husband William T. had been born in 1853 and died in 1915. They have a single tombstone with both their names at the cemetery.

We write quite often about the dangerous professions in mining, lumbering, farming and railroads. But there are times when you really need to consider the outlying dangers such as what happened to poor Mrs. Fairchild. Despite the fact that locomotive engines had spark retarders on their smoke stacks, that didn’t mean that an occasional cinder couldn’t escape like it did for her episode. An example of a smoke stack can be seen at the museum.

For this and more, you can come to the museum by phoning 570-946-5020 or emailing museum@scpahistory.com for an appointment or by happenchance on a Tues. or Thurs. Also, visit our website at www.scpahistory.com and please like us on Facebook.