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# Train-Truck Crash Kills 5 in Family

By CAROL CARTER

Union Leader Correspondent

CHARLESTOWN — Police and Amtrak officials today are to continue their investigation into the cause of two early-morning collisions involving Amtrak's "Montreal" passenger train. Five members of a Charlestown family were killed in the initial crash, which occurred at about 5:15 a.m.

Police identified the victims as Dellef Chobotor, 32; his wife, Nancy, 23 and their three daughters, Detrinna, 6, Ericka, 3 and Susan 2.

A fourth daughter, Anna, 8, had been dropped off at the home of a friend just moments before the crash.

According to police, the Chobotors, who reside at

Blueberry Hill Estates Mobile Home Park, had apparently left the older child off just after 5 a.m. so she could walk to school later in the morning. It was believed the family was enroute to Keene where Mrs. Chobotor was employed at the Ramada Inn.

The Chobotors were reportedly traveling up the Lower Landing Road toward Main Street from the densely populated housing settlement on the banks of the Connecticut River. It had not been determined if they had stopped at the town-erected stop sign before proceeding across the unprotected crossing.

The vehicle was hit broadside by the northbound Montreal enroute from Washington, D.C. to Montreal about 5:15 a.m., officials said, and was dragged several hundred

feet along the track. Pieces of wreckage, school books and a child's bicycle were tossed at random along embankments near the crash site.

The train was allowed to leave Charlestown at 7:30 a.m. and two hours later it struck a tractor-trailer loaded with lumber at a crossing in Sharon, Vt. The truck driver, George Vance, 53, of Swanton, was not injured.

The trailer and load of lumber worth about \$9,000 were destroyed, police said. No one on board the train was injured in either accident.

In Charlestown, town Health Officer William Mates arrived at the scene with the ambulance crews and said he had no doubt the victims were killed instantly.

Charlestown Police Chief Robert Colburn said the train

recently changed to a new schedule which put it through Charlestown 40 minutes later than the old schedule.

"Possibly the family didn't expect a train to go across there," he said.

Another nearby resident of the area said he never heard the train's warning whistle as it rounded the curve several hundred feet south of the crossing but claims "only one out of 10" trains ever issues that mandatory warning blast.

"That's a real dangerous crossing . . . you have to be right on top of it to see anything and those Amtrak trains move so fast, they're sitting right on top of you before you have a chance," the man said.

This same spokesman said many times he watched vehi-

CRASH

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POLICE AND FIREMEN survey the scene of yesterday's early-morning crash in Charlestown which took the lives of a Charlestown couple and their three daughters. Am-

trak's "Montreal" passenger train, which yesterday began its ninth year in operation, was headed north from Washington, D.C., to Montreal when the accident occurred.

Covered with blankets are the bodies of three of the victims, one on the hill at right, a second just behind the driver's side of the car and another on the passengers' side. The train was

involved in another accident in Vermont within two hours after leaving Charlestown. No one was hurt in that crash. (Photo by Carol Carter)

cles experience "near misses" at the crossing.

State Representative Frederick Domini, a police chief in the community for several years, said several accidents were reported at the six railroad crossings in Charlestown in little more than a year. Domini termed the responsibility for safety at crossings a "buck passing" situation and plans to offer Selectmen a plan to bring a Bill into the legislature to help fund some crossing signals.

A spokesman for the Boston and Maine in Billerica, Mass., Gloria Stone, said yesterday the responsibility is a "joint effort" and N.H. law only requires one crossbuck railroad sign at each crossing. She added, however, that in densely-populated areas, flashing signals or gates are mandated.

While in Charlestown, stewards from the Amtrak train grimly watched the removal of the bodies and explained they were carrying about 100 passengers enroute to Montreal. The train included a club and dining car, two sleepers, two coaches and a baggage car, they said.

The speed limit for trains through Charlestown is 50 miles per hour, according to Mrs. Stone. Officials said the Montrealer was travelling 48 miles an hour when the Charlestown crash occurred.

"It's a very dangerous crossing," said James Hearne, a weekly newspaper reporter who lives in Charlestown. "You have to be practically on the railroad to see either north or south."

He and Rodney Webster of the Sullivan County Sheriff's office said there were five accidents at Charlestown railroad crossings in 1977, but none at the site of Monday's mishap and none involving injuries.

"I happened to be one of them," said Hearne. "I came down onto a crossing that had no lights, no stop sign, no nothing. No vision. No visibility. I pulled onto the track and saw a train coming. I decided it was time to jump. I did, too, and the car was demolished."

Two engines and a baggage car of the Montrealer derailed in Charlestown in 1975 when heavy rains flooded the low-lying tracks near the Connecticut River. Officials said if one of the engines hadn't slid into a tree, it would have skidded into the river.

The Montrealer has been plagued with problems along the Boston and Maine Railroad tracks running up both sides of the Connecticut. Most of its route in northern New England lies in Vermont, but the tracks switch into New Hampshire between Bellows Falls and Windsor.

Poor rail beds in both states have caused a rash of minor derailments and delays caused by washouts in recent years. Early this spring a track washout in Vermont forced the northbound and southbound Amtrak trains to stop.

Ironically, yesterday's double wreck took place on the day that Amtrak entered its ninth year and the U.S. Transportation Department has proposed to discontinue 43 percent of

its system, including the Montrealer, because of the system's financial problems.

U.S. Rep. James Cleveland (R-N.H.) said yesterday Senate transportation subcommittee Monday night approve an Amtrak authorization bill that includes a \$5 million subsidy for the Montrealer.

The measure still must be approved by the full House and Senate, but Cleveland predicted the bill would pass.

Police said last night it was believed that Anna, the little girl who survives, will be staying with her mother's relative in Bellows Falls, Vt.

Mrs. Fred Poisson, owner of the mobile home park where the family resided said they were well liked by their neighbors and had lived there less than two years.

Mr. Chobotor was born in Germany and had lived in Charlestown for 2½ years, formerly living in Alstead and California.

He was employed as a control draftsman for the Kingsbury Machine Tool Corp. in Keene for the past 2½ years. He worked on the Kingsbury company newspaper and was a former EMT in Alstead. Both he and his wife were avid CB radio operators. Mr. Chobotor was a veteran of the Vietnam War, having served in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Mrs. Nancy M. (Cheeney) Chobotor, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Majorie (Robbins) Cheeney of Bellows Falls, Vt., was born in Lowell, Mass., and was employed as a waitress at the Ramada Inn in Keene for the past two weeks.

Besides her parents, she is survived by five brothers: Joseph Cheeney of Cucamonga, Calif.; Bruce Cheeney and David Cheeney, both of Langdon, Stephen Cheeney and Michael Cheeney, both of Bellows Falls, Vt.; a maternal grandmother, Mrs. Eva Robbins of Camden, S.C.; aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews.

Detrianna P. Chobotor was born Feb. 6, 1973.

Erica M. Chobotor was born June 30, 1975. Susan N. Chobotor was born Nov. 28, 1977.

The McCusker-Stringer Charlestown Memorial Chapel is in charge of arrangements, which were incomplete last night.