



the **Prairie Tales** podcast

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RUNAWAY! INSTANT HORSE RACING

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This episode summarizes a collection of newspaper excerpts detailing incidents involving runaway horses and vehicles in Newton, Kansas, and nearby communities between November 1884 and January 1887. The sources highlight the frequent occurrence of such events, their varied causes, and the often severe consequences, ranging from minor damage to fatal injuries.

Main Themes:

1. Pervasiveness of Runaway Incidents: The sheer number of reported incidents within a relatively short timeframe (1884-1887) underscores the commonality of runaway horses as a significant hazard in daily life during this period. The sources frequently begin with phrases indicating the routine nature of these reports, such as "Last week seemed to be fruitful of casualties" (George Nichols, November 12, 1884) or "Again we are called on to make note of a runaway" (A. Shuster's Horses, January 25, 1887). One article even notes, "It seems that runaways are becoming contagious" (A. Shuster's Horses, January 25, 1887), suggesting a public awareness of their prevalence.

2. Diverse Causes of Runaways: The incidents were triggered by a variety of factors, demonstrating the unpredictable nature of horse behavior and external stimuli:

- **Loud Noises/Sudden Disturbances:Trains:** The "cannon ball train" frightened Mr. McArthur's team (July 9, 1886), and a locomotive startled A. Shuster's horses at the Santa Fe depot (January 25, 1887). C.W. Gimth also had a "narrow escape while attempting to hold a horse belonging to S.C. Prouty close to an approaching train" (September 9, 1886).
- **Dogs:** E. Worthington's team ran away when "a dog ran from among some high grass" (January 26, 1887).
- **Driver Incapacity/Absence:** An "unnamed farmer" described as "crippled" was "unable to control the team" (March 2, 1886).

- Henrietta Friday was left to "hold the team which became frightened" while her husband was "absent from the wagon on business" (January 17, 1887).
- **Unknown/Unspecified Causes:** Several reports simply state that a team ran away without specifying the trigger, such as the "serious runaway" on Walnut street where "no two reports agree as to whose team it was or in what the damage consisted" (Unnamed Person, March 27, 1886).

3. Significant Risk of Injury and Fatality: Runaway incidents posed a substantial threat to human life and well-being. Several cases resulted in severe injuries or death:

- **Fatalities:** **George Nichols** was "killed by being thrown from a load of straw and running a pitchfork through his heart" (November 12, 1884).
- **John Ericson** "had his skull fractured so that he died in a few minutes" after being thrown from a wagon (November 14, 1884).
- **Henrietta Friday** suffered a "sudden and horrible death" when she was "thrown from the wagon, the wheels of which passed over her head" (January 17, 1887).
- **Serious Injuries:** **William Mooney**, described as "quite deaf," was "picked up unconscious" and found to have "numerous severe bruises" after being run over (October 4, 1885).
- **Mrs. Charles E. Honeyman** experienced a significant "shaking up" (September 9, 1886).
- **Walter Hassan's horse** was "seriously injuring itself" (December 26, 1886).
- **C.W. Gimth** was "struck in the short ribs with both fore feet" by a rearing horse (September 9, 1886).
- **Lucky Escapes/Minor Injuries:** Some individuals were fortunate to emerge relatively unscathed despite the chaotic circumstances. Mr. McArthur's runaway "luckily ended in nothing worse than some breakages" (July 9, 1886). E. Worthington was "miraculously covering Mr. W. under the wagon bed without hardly a scratch or a bruise" after his wagon flipped (January 26, 1887).

4. Property Damage: Beyond human harm, runaways frequently resulted in damage to vehicles and other property:

- Mr. McArthur's incident involved "some breakages" (July 9, 1886).
- Walter Hassan's horse "demolishing the buggy" (December 26, 1886).
- A. Shuster's horses, after their run, "demoralized two buggies somewhat" and caused "a side plate glass and spring were broken besides some scratches" (January 25, 1887).
- E. Worthington's wagon "collided with the side of a blacksmith shop, turning the wagon completely in the air and over" (January 26, 1887).

5. Geographic Scope: While many incidents occurred in **Newton**, the reports also mention events in nearby towns like **Halstead** (Mr. McArthur, July 9, 1886), **Hesston** (C.W. Gimth and Mrs. Charles E. Honeyman, September 9, 1886), and **Annelly** (E. Worthington, January 26, 1887). This indicates that runaway incidents were not isolated to a single urban center but were a broader regional concern in areas reliant on horse-drawn transportation. Specific locations within Newton are also named, such as Main street, First street, Walnut street, and the Santa Fe depot.

Most Important Ideas/Facts:

- **High Incidence Rate:** The frequency of these reports (11 distinct incidents, plus an unnamed one, in just over two years) highlights runaways as a major public safety concern of the era.
- **Severe Consequences:** Runaways were not merely an inconvenience; they were a significant cause of death and serious injury. Three fatalities (George Nichols, John Ericson, Henrietta Friday) are explicitly mentioned within this small dataset, demonstrating the deadly potential of these events.
- **Vulnerability of Individuals:** Certain individuals were particularly vulnerable, such as the "crippled farmer" (March 2, 1886), the "deaf" William Mooney (October 4, 1885), and women left to manage teams (Henrietta Friday, Mrs. Charles E. Honeyman).
- **Impact of Modernity (Trains):** The advent and expansion of railroads directly contributed to runaway incidents, as horses were easily spooked by trains and locomotives. This illustrates a collision between traditional transportation methods and emerging technology.
- **Routine Reporting:** The newspaper coverage, often brief and factual, suggests that these incidents were a regular feature of local news, reflecting their commonality in the lives of the readership.

Thought Starters:

What was a "runaway" in the context of late 19th-century Newton, Kansas?

A "runaway" referred to an incident where a horse or team of horses, typically hitched to a vehicle like a wagon, buggy, or hack, became frightened and bolted, running wildly out of control. These events were a frequent occurrence, as evidenced by the numerous newspaper reports from Newton and surrounding towns like Halstead, Hesston, and Annelly between 1884 and 1887.

What were the common causes of runaways?

The sources indicate several triggers for horses to become spooked and run away. Loud noises, such as an approaching "cannon ball train" or a locomotive at the Santa Fe depot, were a

significant cause. Sudden appearances, like a dog running from tall grass, could also startle a team. Some incidents occurred when horses were left unattended, breaking loose from hitching posts, or when drivers were unable to control their teams, such as a "crippled farmer" on Main Street.

What were the potential consequences of runaways for people?

The consequences for individuals involved in runaways ranged from minor injuries to fatal outcomes. William Mooney, who was deaf, was picked up unconscious with "numerous severe bruises" after being run over. Mrs. Charles E. Honeyman suffered a "shaking up," while C.W. Gimth had a "narrow escape" with no broken bones. Tragically, George Nichols was killed when thrown from a load of straw, impaled by a pitchfork, and John Ericson and Henrietta Friday both died from skull fractures after being thrown from wagons and run over by the wheels.

What kind of damage did runaways cause to property?

Runaways frequently resulted in significant property damage. Vehicles like buggies and wagons were often "demolished," as seen with Walter Hassan's buggy and E. Worthington's wagon being completely overturned. In other instances, "some breakages" occurred, and A. Shuster's hacks sustained a "broken side plate glass and spring" and also "demoralized two buggies" at the stable. Horses themselves could also be seriously injured during these uncontrolled sprints.

Where did runaways typically occur in and around Newton?

Runaways were reported in various locations, both within the town of Newton and in surrounding areas. Within Newton, incidents took place on specific streets like Main Street, Walnut Street, and Sixth Street. The Santa Fe depot and the Fort Scott railroad grade were also noted as locations for runaways. Beyond the immediate town, incidents were reported in nearby communities such as Halstead, Hesston, and Annelly, often involving travel between these locations.

Were runaways considered a common or rare occurrence?

The sources strongly suggest that runaways were a common and even frequent occurrence. Phrases like "Last week seemed to be fruitful of casualties," "Again we are called on to make note of a runaway," and "It seems that runaways are becoming contagious" highlight the regularity of these incidents. The numerous reports in short timeframes across multiple years further emphasize their prevalence in daily life.

Were there any miraculous escapes from runaways?

Yes, despite the severe risks, some individuals experienced incredibly lucky escapes. E. Worthington, for example, was "miraculously covering Mr. W. under the wagon bed without hardly a scratch or a bruise" after his wagon collided with a blacksmith shop and overturned. Mr. McArthur's runaway "luckily ended in nothing worse than some breakages" for him, his wife, and son, despite being thrown from their buggy.

How did the community react to or report on these incidents?

Newspapers in Newton, such as The Newton Kansan and The Newton Daily Republican, played a key role in reporting these incidents. They provided detailed accounts of the circumstances, the individuals involved, and the outcomes. The tone of the reports varied from matter-of-fact descriptions of casualties to expressions of relief for narrow escapes, and even a sense of weariness or concern over the frequency, noting that "runaways are becoming contagious."

Study Guide:

Quiz:

1. What were the primary causes of the fatal runaway incidents involving George Nichols and John Ericson?
2. How did the incident involving William Mooney differ from the other runaway events described in terms of the victim's immediate state and the cause of the accident?
3. What was the reported outcome of the runaway involving Mr. McArthur's team near Halstead, and what specific element frightened his horses?
4. Describe the circumstances surrounding C.W. Gimth's "narrow escape" and the injury he sustained.
5. What was the fate of Walter Hassan's buggy and horse after his runaway incident in Newton?
6. Explain the tragic circumstances of Henrietta Friday's death. Who was present, and what was the immediate cause of her fatality?
7. What caused A. Shuster's horses to run away at the Santa Fe depot, and what was the extent of the damage reported?
8. How did E. Worthington miraculously escape serious injury despite his wagon being overturned and colliding with a blacksmith shop?
9. Based on the incidents, what common locations or scenarios appear to be high-risk for runaways in Newton?
10. The article mentions runaways "becoming contagious." What does this suggest about the public perception or frequency of these incidents during this period?

Answer Key:

1. George Nichols was killed when he was thrown from a load of straw and impaled by a pitchfork after his team ran away. John Ericson died from a fractured skull after being thrown from his wagon by a runaway team. Both incidents highlight the immediate and often fatal dangers of losing control of horses.

2. William Mooney's incident was a non-fatal collision where he, being deaf, was run over by a vehicle. Unlike the other runaways that primarily involved the driver losing control of their own team, Mooney was a pedestrian struck by another's vehicle, highlighting a different kind of street hazard.
3. Mr. McArthur's runaway resulted in "nothing worse than some breakages" after his team was frightened by a "cannon ball train." The horses eventually became entangled in a hedge fence, leading to their capture.
4. C.W. Gimth had a "narrow escape" while trying to hold S.C. Prouty's horse near an approaching train. The horse reared up and struck Gimth in the short ribs with its fore feet, but fortunately, no bones were broken.
5. After breaking loose from a hitching post, Walter Hassan's horse ran a block or two before jumping over the Fort Scott railroad grade. This action demolished the buggy and seriously injured the horse itself.
6. Henrietta Friday died when a team hitched to a wagon ran away. Her husband, Jacob Friday, had left her to hold the team, which became frightened, throwing her from the wagon, and the wheels passed over her head, causing her death.
7. A. Shuster's horses were frightened by a locomotive at the Santa Fe depot. They ran through several streets, causing a side plate glass and spring to be broken, along with some scratches, and somewhat demoralized two buggies upon entering the stable.
8. E. Worthington miraculously escaped serious injury when his wagon overturned and collided with a blacksmith shop. Despite the violent accident, he was covered by the wagon bed without hardly a scratch or bruise.
9. Common high-risk locations or scenarios for runaways in Newton appear to include main streets (Main and First, Main, Walnut, Sixth streets), near railroad tracks (Santa Fe depot, Fort Scott railroad grade, cannon ball train encounters), and general town driving conditions. The presence of trains and unexpected noises were significant triggers.
10. The statement that runaways were "becoming contagious" suggests that these incidents were occurring with increasing frequency or were widely discussed within the community. It implies a sense of shared experience or concern among the populace regarding the common hazard of runaway horses.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the role of urban infrastructure and transportation (e.g., railroads, main streets, hitching posts) in contributing to or mitigating runaway incidents in Newton, Kansas, during the period of 1884-1887.
2. Compare and contrast the immediate consequences (injuries, fatalities, property damage) of the various runaway incidents described in the excerpts. What patterns emerge regarding the severity of outcomes?

3. Discuss the human element in these runaway incidents, considering the actions of drivers, bystanders, and victims. How do human decisions or lack of control influence the trajectory and outcome of these events?
4. Examine the language used by the newspaper reports to describe these incidents. What insights do terms like "sudden and horrible death," "narrow escape," or "demolished" offer about public perception and the dramatic nature of these events?
5. Beyond the immediate cause (e.g., dog, train), what underlying factors or environmental conditions can be inferred from the excerpts that made runaway incidents a recurring hazard in 19th-century Newton?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Casualties:** Persons injured or killed in an accident or battle.
- **Demolished:** Completely destroy or break apart.
- **Entangled:** Cause to become twisted together with or caught in.
- **Fractured:** Broken (often referring to a bone).
- **Hacks:** Short for hackney-coach, a carriage for hire, or in this context, the horses pulling it.
- **Interred:** Buried (a corpse) in a grave or tomb, typically with funeral rites.
- **Locomotive:** A powered rail vehicle used for pulling trains.
- **Neck Yoke:** A wooden bar or frame attached to the necks of two draft animals (such as oxen or horses) and to the tongue of a wagon, plow, or other implement that they are to pull.
- **Pitchfork:** A farm tool with a long handle and two or three long, pointed prongs, used for lifting and tossing hay.
- **Runaway Team:** A team of horses or other draft animals that has broken free from control and is running wildly.
- **Shaft:** Either of two long poles extending from a carriage, wagon, etc., between which a horse is harnessed.
- **Tongue:** The pole that extends forward from a wagon or carriage, to which the draft animals (horses) are attached.
- **Vehicle:** A thing used for transporting people or goods, especially on land, such as a car, truck, or cart.