LYONS, William Joseph 1 August 1904

Designation	Accident Location	Accident Due to
Fireman	Poison Gully, UDRR	Loco G134 Derailed

William Lyons, Fireman, was 25 years of age when he was fatally injured in what was to become known as the Poison Gully railway disaster. His Driver George Geer was also killed in the derailment of G134 on the UDRR. William was single and lived with his parents in Midland Junction. He is interred at Midland Cemetery (ANGLICAN/A/0030).

See also GEER, George

To facilitate street improvements near the Carnegie Library, Midland Junction, the Midland Junction Municipal Council has moved the Geer and Lyons memorial fountain from the library corner to a more suitable site opposite the Midland Junction Trades Hall, at the corner of Railway-parade and Helena Street, where it is now being re-erected. The fountain is in memory of George Geer (driver) and William Lyons (fireman) who were killed in an accident at Poison Gully, on the Kalamunda line, on August 1, 1904. Early on the morning of that day they left Midland Junction with a train of empty trucks and a brake-van and proceeded along the Kalamunda line. When they reached Poison Gully the train was derailed because of a wash awayof a culvert and bank caused by an abnormally heavy flood. Where the culvert had been was a gap about 15ft. to 20ft. wide and 7ft. deep, and the rails and sleepers there were hanging without their proper foundations. The engine dived into this opening and both the men were killed.

Source: *Trove/The West Australian (Perth), 23 March 1935.*

George Geer was 42 years old and married to Alice.
William Joseph Lyons was 25, single and lived with his parents.

Author's Note: *The Sunday Times was scathing in its assessment of events leading up to the tragedy at Poison Gully. As follows;*

SHEER INSANITY. POISON GULLY ACCIDENT.
BLIND LOOSENESS AND LYING.
During the week an inquest was held on the bodies of the two men, Lyons and Geer, who were killed in the recent railway accident at Poison Gully. Two days were occupied in taking voluminous evidence, and the inquiry was then adjourned to Tuesday, when further testimony will be given and the jury's finding probably announced

We do not propose to anticipate or influence the verdict or to seriously transgress the ordinary rules of etiquette relative to matters subjudice, but we intend to connect obvious facts disclosed at the inquiry with the object of substantiating our previous contention, which is, that the railway authorities in this case exhibited a flagrant lack of method, and an almost supreme disregard for the safety of their men. In truth, reading the report of the case, it is hard to find any excuse or mitigating circumstances for the dreadful blundering, laxity and mental fog which preceded and led up to the tragedy. It appears that it was a certain ganger's duty to patrol the Poison Gully length of the line and see that it was clear. This man fell sick on Saturday, July 30 (the accident happened on Monday August 1), and stayed away from work. He Did Not Report his absence to the inspector, but told a repairer, who happened along that he would not be able to go to work on Monday-at least he says

so he told him, the repairer denies it, and gave the man directions to do certain work on that day. Sunday was left out of the reckoning. The ganger did not patrol the line on Sunday nor did anyone else. The regulations state that the line is to be patrolled on Sundays, and the ganger says he would have done it had he been well, and that in his absence the repairer, who had been constituted acting-ganger should have done it. In cross-examination, however, be admitted that he had never done Sunday work during the five months be had been in charge of the section, probably because, as another witness said, they did not get paid for Sundays. Such was the first act of the tragedy, the line not patrolled by the men told often to do it, without pay, it should be marked, or reward. The next act begins with the discovery of the wash away by a civilian. A quarryman strolling along the line, came upon the wash away at 5 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, and reported the matter to the nearest siding, where there was a telephone. The wife of the quarry manager thereupon sent a telephone message to the Midland Junction railway station communicating the fact. Prior to this, it appears, a ganger had reported that part of the line nearer Midland Junction was under water, and the person who received the telephone message replied, apparently apropos of this, that a ganger had come in and said there were six inches of water on the rails." The woman rejoined, as she deposed, "No; there is no water on the rails at the spot he means," and the man at the station replied "Right." Here was in effect, a direct and unmistakable report that the line was unsafe at Poison Gully, if it had been attended to, there would have been no accident. Yet, from some inscrutable cause, the message miscarried. This is the mysterious part of the tragedy. The report was certainly received at the station, and the man who received it was just as certainly employed there (although it has been stated that there were a number of outsiders about any of whom could have got admission to the telephone room). Yet each station witness examined so far denied that he was the recipient of the report and expressed his ignorance that it was ever taken. In this there is either direct lying or concealment of the truth. Someone must bear in his mind the burden of the knowledge that he received the intelligence which would have prevented a frightful tragedy and he neglected to act upon it. It is difficult to imagine, moreover, that only one man holds the awful secret. The message was in the nature of it one that would be communicated to others, whether the, recipient was a junior officer or one in authority. However, it was kept a secret, the intelligence was wasted, and the line being deemed safe, "in the absence of reports to the contrary," Geer and Lyons were sent out to their doom. Such, in brief, is the story of the events leading up to the tragedy.

It is a story of shameful negligence, of looseness, of lying, of insane lack of system and blind foolhardiness at the expense of men's lives. Little was done of what should have been done and that was done wrong "In such weather," says an expert witness, "as that of July 31st, it was necessary according to regulations, to constantly patrol the line, both day and night." That was not done. The ganger was ill. The inspector above him was away on holiday. The railway authorities at Midland to whom the fact of the wash away, was communicated, "were not aware of it." No pilot engine was sent out. No. 5 engine was allowed to leave tender first. Everything in the proceedings of the railway people points to a blind, unreasoning disregard for accident which is simply astounding. "The people at Midland Junction were not justified in dispatching a train over the line and assuming that everything was alright having received no message to the contrary." That is what the expert referred to says, and he is unquestionably right. In face of the fact that the stormiest weather of the year had occurred since trains had passed over the line the proceeding was absolute madness. Yet the responsible people justify their action with a cool reliance on precedent. It is of the most striking features of this remorseless revelation of railway methods this confident leaning on the system. And doubtless it was the system that was responsible for the tragedy, the system that is without cohesion or certainty ; that allows officers to do what they please and trusts to Providence for the outcome. Such wholesale looseness, such careless reckless do-nothing, may be traced with certainty to the fountainhead. The fact of having an ignorant hog at the head of the service encourages men to do what they like, to neglect precautions, to act "anyhow," confident that any dereliction on their

part will not be discovered. It is only on tragic occasions like these that the general laxity is revealed. And it is only on these occasions that, the public get a glimpse of how the safety of traffic is attended to under the rule of George. There is one thing that stands out from the confusion of neglect and recklessness and tragedy, and that is the duty thrown upon the Government of adequately compensating the dependents of the men who were so blindly sent to their death.

Source: *Trove/The Sunday Times (Perth) Sunday 14 August 1904 Page 5.*