

WRECK OF THE OLD 97 [LAWS G 2]

Traditional Old-Time and Bluegrass Song; **DATE:** Early 1900's; **CATEGORY:** Early Country and Bluegrass Songs; **RECORDING INFO:** G. B. Grayson and Henry Whitter-1927; Stoneman Family Don Reno, Red Smiley and the Tennessee Cut Ups; Kelly Harrell; Norman and Nancy Blake; **OTHER NAMES:** Wreck of the Southern Old 97; **NOTES:** No ballad composition has touched more Americans than the song describing the wreck of mail train No.97. "Old 97," which consisted of four cars and locomotive No.1102, crashed on September 27, 1903. Engineer Joseph A. Broady was trying to make up time as his train approached Danville down a three-mile grade. He realized he did not have enough air pressure to slow the train for an upcoming curved trestle, and in vain he reversed the engine to lock the wheels. "Old 97" vaulted off the trestle, and 11 people were killed. "The Wreck of the Old 97" was initially recorded commercially by Virginia musicians G. B. Grayson and Henry Whitter, but when it was released by singer Vernon Dalhart, it became the first million-selling record in the United States. David G. George, a Pittsylvania telegraph operator who was at the accident scene, was the song's original author. George composed the ballad by adding new lyrics to the altered tune of an older song, Ship That Never Returned.

Oh they gave him his or-ders in Mon-roe Vir - gin-ia say-ing Steve you're way be-hind time

This is not thir-ty eight but it's old Nine-ty Sev-en you must put her in to Spen-cer on time.

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D **G** **D** **A**
Well, they give him his orders at Monroe Virginia, Saying: Pete, you're way behind time

D **G** **D** **A** **D**
This ain't thirty-eight, but it's old ninety-seven, And you've got to be in Danville on time.

But he turned around to his black greasy fireman, Said: Shovel in a little more coal
When we cross the White Oak Mountain, You can watch old ninety-seven roll.

It's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville, On a line on a three mile grade
It is on this grade that he lost his airbrakes, And you see what a jump he made.

He was a-going down the grade making ninety miles an hour
And his whistle broke out in a scream
It is on that grade that he lost his airbrakes, And you see what a jump he made.

He was a-going down the grade making ninety miles an hour, And his whistle begin to scream
And they found him in the wreck
With his hand on his throttle and scalded to death by the steam.

Well, ladies, you can all take warning, From this time now and on
Never speak harsh words to your true loving husband, He might leave you and never return.