

**George Westinghouse - I**

**Lead: On a dark February night in 1871, the chief engineer of the New York Central's crack Pacific Express, Doc Simmons, peered beyond a rounded bend south of Poughkeepsie, New York and saw disaster coming and could do absolutely nothing about it.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Everything was executed precisely. Simmons blew the emergency whistle. Trainmen between each of the passenger cars went to**

**their stations. The icy handles began to turn. The brakes began to bite. Too little. Too late. A wrecked freight train lay tumbled across the small drawbridge just ahead. The Pacific Express, its useless brakes complaining loudly, drove through the oil-filled tank cars and pitched into Wappinger Creek. The tanks ignited. Thirty people died including Doc Simmons. Pity. Had the New York Central not been so cheap, Simmons would surely have been able to save lives that night. Already available was a device so effective that it was to revolutionize the railroad industry. In the public outcry following the Wappinger Creek disaster, New York Central and most other major lines began to equip their passenger stock with an invention by a**

**little-known engineer. It was the air brake. His name was George Westinghouse.**

**George was born in upstate New York in 1846. He was ordinarily a listless student, but could spring to life if a mechanical problem caught his interest. After service in the Union Army during the Civil War, Westinghouse tried a few months of college, but washed out. During this time he discovered that he had the curious inclination of an inventor. In the late 1860s, Westinghouse was on a business trip to Troy, New York and was delayed by the collision of two trains whose brakes were just too weak and too slow to stop the trains in time. It mattered little that U.S.**

**trackage had grown from 35,000 miles in 1865 to 50,000 miles five years later. Imperfect brakes shrank the amount of traffic on those tracks thus keeping industry from realizing its full potential. The solution was not long in coming. Next time: St. George, patron saint of the railroad.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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