

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2840

THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

AT RIDGWAY, PA., ON

NOVEMBER 4, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad: Baltimore & Ohio
Date: November 4, 1944
Location: Ridgway, Pa.
Kind of accident: Side collision
Trains involved: Passenger : Freight
Train numbers: 50 : Extra 7534 West
Engine numbers: 5138 : 7534
Consist: 4 cars : 97 cars, caboose
Estimated speed: Standing : 15 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable, train orders and
automatic block-signal system
Track: Double; tangent; 0.26 percent
descending grade westward
Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle
of 14°; practically level
Weather: Dense fog
Time: 3:15 a. m.
Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured
Cause: Engine of passenger train obstruct-
ing adjacent main track immediately
in front of an approaching freight
train after the engine was derailed
as result of striking stalled auto-
mobile at street grade crossing

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2840

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD COMPANY

December 14, 1944.

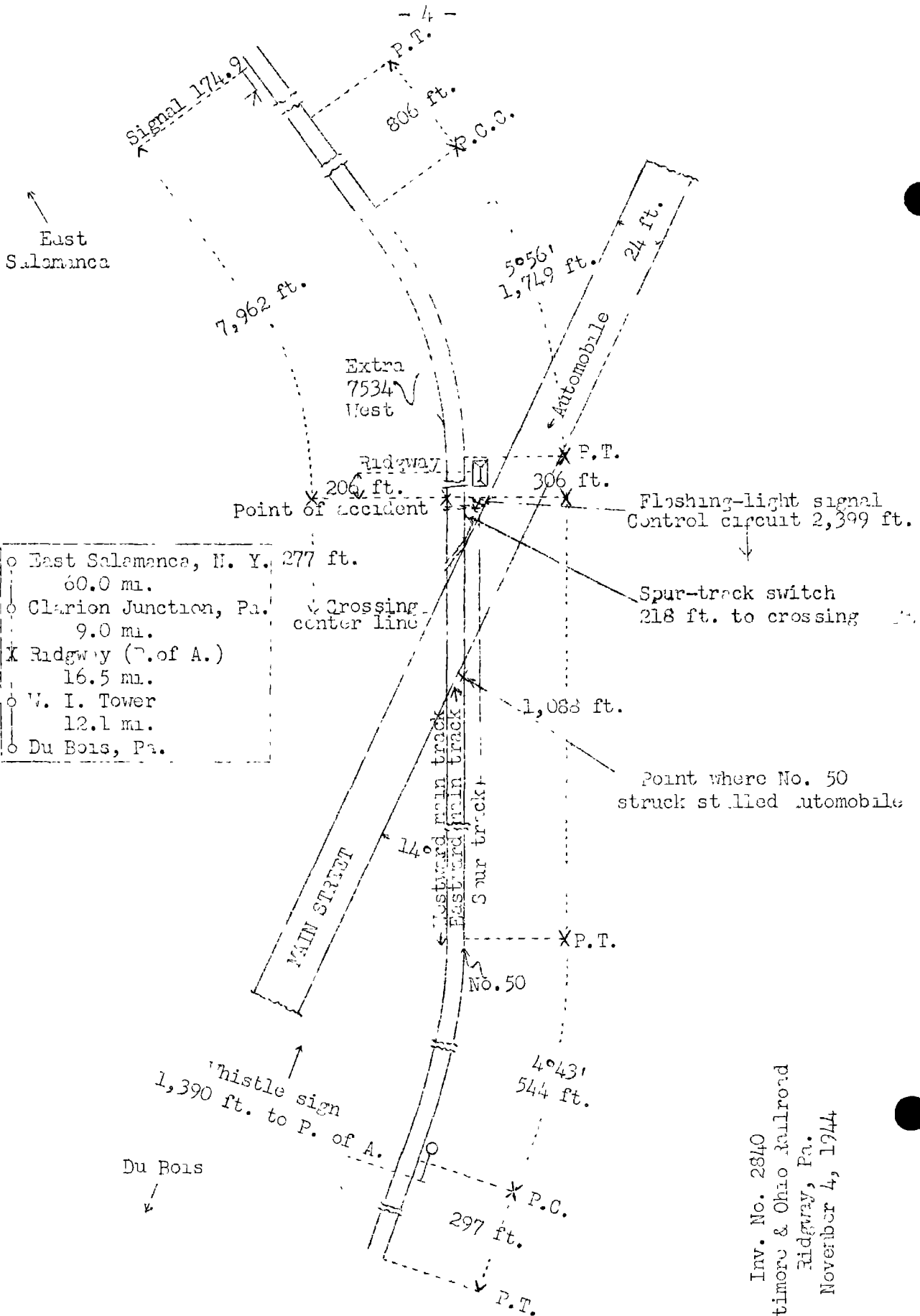
Accident at Ridgway, Pa., on November 4, 1944, caused by an engine of a passenger train obstructing an adjacent main track immediately in front of an approaching freight train after the engine was derailed as a result of striking a stalled automobile at a street grade crossing.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On November 4, 1944, there was a side collision between a freight train and the engine of a passenger train which had been derailed as a result of striking a stalled automobile at a street grade crossing on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at Ridgway, Pa. This accident resulted in the death of one employee, and the injury of two employees.

¹Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Inv. No. 2840
 Baltimore & Ohio Railroad
 Ridgway, Pa.
 November 4, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Buffalo Division designated as the 2nd Sub-Division and extending eastward from Du Bois, Pa., to East Salamanca, N. Y., 97.6 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this was a double-track line over which trains moving with the current of traffic were operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred on the westward main track 28.6 miles east of Du Bois, at a point 206 feet west of the station at Ridgway. From the west there were, in succession, a tangent 297 feet in length, a $4^{\circ}43'$ curve to the left 544 feet, and a tangent 1,088 feet to the point of accident. From the east there were, in succession, a tangent 806 feet in length, a compound curve to the right 1,749 feet, the maximum curvature of which was $5^{\circ}56'$, and a tangent 306 feet to the point of accident. The grade for west-bound trains was 0.26 percent descending.

At a point 483 feet west of the station at Ridgway, Main Street intersected the railroad at an angle of 14° . From the south on Main Street there was a tangent a considerable distance to the crossing and some distance northward. The grade was practically level. At the crossing there was a spur track south of the eastward main track. The switch of the spur track was trailing-point for east-bound movements on the eastward main track, and was 218 feet east of the crossing. South of the crossing Main Street was surfaced with macadam to a width of 24 feet. The crossing was 50 feet wide and the distance from the south rail of the spur track to the north rail of the westward main track was about 45 feet. The area between the rails of the spur track was surfaced with macadam. Two planks 8 inches wide and one plank 8 inches wide were provided, respectively, outside and inside the rails of the eastward main track. One plank 8 inches wide was provided inside each rail of the westward main track. The remainder of the surface of the crossing was paved with macadam.

A flashing-light warning signal was located in the south-east angle of the intersection 17.5 feet south of the center-line of the eastward main track and 14.8 feet east of the center-line of the street. On the mast of this signal a cross-buck sign was mounted 10 feet 4 inches above the level of the street, and bore the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black letters on a white background. A horizontal bar was mounted on the mast below the cross-buck sign, and a hooded lamp was attached to each end of this bar. When an east-bound train occupied any portion of the eastward main track throughout a distance of 2,399 feet immediately west of the crossing, these lamps flashed red lights alternately. A crossing-whistle sign for east-bound trains was located 1,390 feet west of the crossing. Automatic signal 174.9, which governed west-bound movements on the westward main track, was 7,962 feet east of the point of accident.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine Whistle Signals.

Note.--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "___" for longer sounds.
* * *

| SOUND. | INDICATION. |
|---------------|---|
| * * * | |
| (1) ___ o ___ | Approaching public crossings at grade. To be prolonged or repeated until crossing is reached. |
| * * * | |

102. When a train is disabled or stopped suddenly by an emergency application of the air brakes or other causes, adjacent tracks * * * that are liable to be obstructed must at once be protected until it is ascertained they are safe and clear for the movement of trains.

The vehicle code of the State of Pennsylvania read in part as follows:

RAILROAD WARNING SIGNALS MUST BE OBEYED

Operators of vehicles approaching an interurban or steam railway grade crossing, must obey a signal that gives warning of the approach of a railway train or car.

In the vicinity of the crossing the maximum authorized speed for all trains on the eastward main track was 30 miles per hour and on the westward main track, 15 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

The automobile involved was a 1937 Chevrolet 2-door sedan which bore Pennsylvania license No. 98-K-67, and was being driven by a person who held learner's permit No. 610263, issued October 11, 1944. The driver was accompanied by one other person who was a licensed driver. The automobile, moving north-westward on Main Street, entered upon the crossing, passed over the spur track, and was passing over the eastward main track when the left front wheel slipped off the west edge of the

crossing and both front wheels stopped against the gage side of the north rail of the eastward main track, and the automobile stalled. About 1 minute later the automobile was struck by No. 50, and was demolished.

No. 50, an east-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 5188, one express car, one mail car, one baggage-express car and one coach, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. This train passed W. I. Tower, 16.5 miles west of Ridgway and the last open office, at 2:52 a. m., 29 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 20 miles per hour it struck the stalled automobile. Part of the wreckage became lodged under the engine-truck wheels, which were derailed to the left immediately east of the crossing. Then following wheels of the engine became derailed to the left at the spur-track switch, and the engine stopped about 3:13 a. m., practically upright, across the westward main track and 382 feet east of the crossing. About 2 minutes later the engine was struck by Extra 7534 West, and was badly damaged.

Extra 7534 West, a west-bound freight train, consisting of engine 7534, 97 cars and a caboose, passed Clarion Junction, 9 miles east of Ridgway and the last open office, at 2:53 a. m., passed signal 174.9, which displayed proceed, and while moving at an estimated speed of 15 miles per hour it struck the derailed engine of No. 50. The engine, the first car, the fifth to the seventh cars, inclusive, and the eighteenth to the twenty-fifth cars, inclusive, of Extra 7534 West were derailed, and were considerably damaged.

There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:15 a. m.

The fireman of Extra 7534 West was killed, and the engineer and the front brakeman were injured.

Discussion

The flashing-light warning signal, located to the right of the direction in which the automobile was moving, was illuminated when the automobile entered upon the crossing. The warning signal was seen by the occupants of the automobile. They stated that a stop was made before the automobile entered upon the crossing, then, as no approaching train was seen or heard, the automobile was driven upon the crossing. However, the automobile ran off the pavement and stalled. It obstructed the eastward main track about 1 minute prior to the approach of No. 50, an east-bound passenger train. An unsuccessful attempt was made by the occupants of the automobile to move it from the crossing, but no effort was made to provide protection for an approaching train.

As No. 50 was approaching the crossing the speed was about 20 miles per hour. The headlight was lighted brightly, and the enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead. The whistle signal for the crossing was sounded in compliance with the rules. Because of the dense fog, which materially restricted their view of the track ahead, the enginemen did not see the stalled automobile, and they were not aware of anything being wrong until the engine was derailed. Then the engineer moved the brake valve to emergency position. The engine stopped across the westward main track, and the fireman immediately proceeded eastward to furnish flag protection. He had reached a point about 320 feet east of the derailed engine and was giving stop signals with a lighted red fusee when the engine of Extra 7534 West passed him.

As Extra 7534 West was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 15 miles per hour. The headlight was lighted brightly, and the enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead. The last automatic signal which this train passed displayed proceed. The first the employees on the engine knew of anything being wrong was when their engine was about 600 feet east of the point where the collision occurred, and they observed, simultaneously, the reflection of the headlight of the derailed engine and a lighted fusee. The engineer immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position, but the collision occurred before the brakes became effective.

The laws of the State of Pennsylvania require that a signal giving a warning of the approach of a railway train must be obeyed. The failure of the driver of the automobile to obey the warning signal resulted in the derailment of the passenger train and then the side collision between the passenger train and the freight train.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by an engine of a passenger train obstructing an adjacent main track immediately in front of an approaching freight train after the engine was derailed as a result of striking a stalled automobile at a street grade crossing.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fourteenth day of December, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. FARTEL,
Secretary.