

Inv-2206

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD

CRESTWOOD, KY.

OCTOBER 15, 1937

INVESTIGATION NO. 2206

SUMMARY

Inv-2206

Railroad: Louisville & Nashville
Date: October 15, 1937.
Location: Crestwood, Ky.
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Freight
Train number: First No. 73
Engine number: 1879
Consist: 39 cars
Speed: 35 to 50 m.p.h.
Track: 3° curve, followed by tangent on
which accident occurred; 0.30
percent ascending grade.
Weather: Clear
Time: 5:45 a.m.
Casualties: 1 killed, 3 injured
Cause: Motor truck driven upon a highway
crossing at grade directly in
front of an approaching train.

Inv-2206

November 2, 1937.

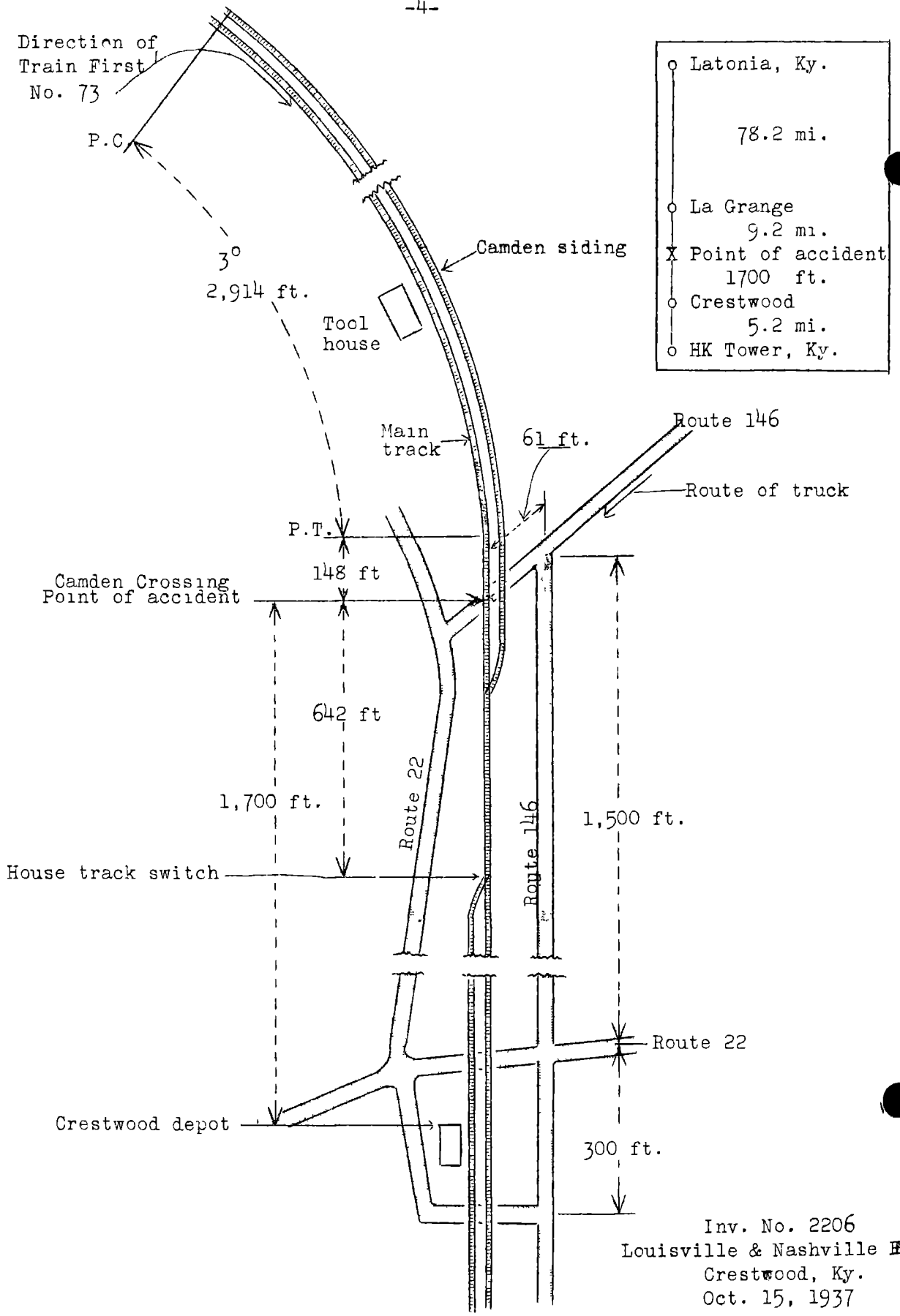
To the Commission:

On October 15, 1937, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad which resulted from striking a motor truck at a highway grade crossing near Crestwood, Ky., causing the death of one employee, and the injury of one employee, and two men on the truck.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Cincinnati Division which extends between HK Tower and Latonia, Ky., a distance of 92.35 miles; it is a single track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block system. The point of accident is 1,700 feet north of the station at Crestwood, on the Camden public crossing. Approaching this point from the north there is a compound curve to the right 2,914 feet long, which has a maximum curvature of 3° , and then a tangent which extends 148 feet to the point of accident and about 1 mile beyond. The grade approaching the crossing is 0.30 percent ascending for south-bound trains. Camden passing track parallels the main track on the east, its south switch being 137 feet south of Camden crossing; a track known as the house track parallels the main track on the west, its north switch being 642 feet south of the crossing. A section tool house, about 15 feet high, located 698 feet north of the crossing, limits the view of the crossing to slightly over 700 feet for an engineman on a south-bound train, while the view of a fireman is limited to about 300 feet because of the curve; however, a view of the highway as it approaches the railroad may be had by the fireman for some distance.

In the vicinity of the point of accident State Highway 22 from the north runs along the west side of the railroad, following its alinement in a general way. State Highway 146 approaches the railroad from the northeast at an angle of about 40° until it reaches a point about 50 feet east of the railroad and 1,700 feet north of the station at Crestwood; from this point it parallels the railroad southward through the town. From the point where route 146 makes the curve to parallel the tracks, a branch road continues straight along the line followed by route 146 in approaching the railroad. It is 61 feet from its point of divergence from route 146 to the east rail of the L. & N. R.R., and after crossing the railroad this highway connects with route 22 on the west side of the tracks.



Inv. No. 2206
 Louisville & Nashville RR
 Crestwood, Ky.
 Oct. 15, 1937

This crossing, called Camden crossing, is 39 feet wide; it has a smooth surface of non-skid asphalt, and crosses 2 tracks at an angle of about 40° from northeast to southwest. Approaching the crossing from the northeast the grade of the highway is approximately 1% ascending. The crossing is equipped with a standard cross-bar sign about 8 feet high located on the north side of the road at a point 15 to 18 feet east of the railroad. The word "Railroad" is painted on one bar of this sign, and the word "Crossing" appears on the other bar, there being no signal devices at this crossing to indicate the approach of train. State Highway 22 crosses the tracks and also State Highway 146 about 200 feet north of Crestwood station, and there is a third grade crossing just south of the station which also affords passage between routes 146 and 22; both of the two latter crossings, in the vicinity of the station, are protected by electric bell, light and wig-wag signals, and traffic if governed by highway signs and numbers would cross the tracks on the crossing just north of the station.

It was daylight and clear at the time of the accident which occurred at 5:45 a.m.

Description

South-bound freight Train First No. 73 consisting of 18 loaded and 20 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1879, and in charge of Conductor Bennett and Engineman Rhodes, passed LaGrange, 9 miles north of Crestwood, at 5:25 a.m., 30 minutes late, according to the train sheet, and while running at a speed estimated at between 40 and 50 miles per hour, was derailed when it struck a truck on the Camden crossing.

The truck involved was a 1937 model Ford truck with a rated capacity of 1½ tons; it was equipped with dual rear wheels and a stake body, and weighed 5,880 pounds, light. It was registered in the name of Roy Watson, Richmond, Ky., and carried Fayette County, Kentucky, license plate 6691-C. This truck, loaded with 12 head of cattle, driven by Ray Gay who was accompanied by J. W. Christopher, left Richmond, Ky., about 105 miles southeast of Crestwood, about 1:30 a.m. and was struck by Train First No. 73 while moving over Camden crossing at a low rate of speed.

The truck was carried on the front end of the locomotive for a distance of about 250 feet and was then thrown to the right of the track in a tangled mass.

As a result of the collision the engine truck of the locomotive was derailed but the wheels remained close to the rails until the facing point switch leading to the house track was

encountered when complete derailment occurred. The engine and tender remained coupled and stopped on their right sides on the house track, parallel to the track, with the front end 1,120 feet south of Camden crossing. The head fourteen cars were badly damaged and stopped in various positions across the tracks north of the locomotive. The fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth cars were derailed but remained upright and were only slightly damaged. The employee killed was the head brakeman, and the employee injured was the engineman.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Rhodes, of Train First No. 73, stated that the air brakes were tested at Latonia and all brakes were reported working. Entering the curve north of Camden crossing his train was running 45 or 50 miles per hour, and at a point about 850 feet north of the crossing he started to sound the crossing whistle. When he reached the section house he got his first view of the crossing and of the highway to the east of the tracks, and he noticed a truck with high sides moving slowly along the highway. When his engine reached the tangent track his view of the highway was cut off but at that time the truck was just entering the branch road which crosses the tracks. Almost immediately thereafter the fireman jumped down on the deck and called a warning regarding a truck, and he made an emergency application of the brakes. Shortly afterward the collision occurred, and he was struck and rendered unconscious. The whistle was being sounded during the entire time that the engine was between the tool house and the crossing.

Fireman Seifried stated that engine 1879 was a stoker-fired engine. Approaching Camden crossing he and the head brakeman were on the seat box on the left side of the engine but due to the fact that they were on the outside of the curve he did not see the crossing until they were between 400 and 500 feet from it. At that time the truck was about 15 feet east of the crossing sign and was moving so slowly that it could be stopped at any time. When the engine was about 260 feet from the crossing it became apparent that the truck was not going to stop and he called a warning to the engineman who immediately closed the throttle and made an emergency application of the brakes. The engineman had started sounding the whistle when the engine was about 1,000 feet north of the crossing and it was still blowing when the emergency application of the brakes was made. The bell was ringing at the time of collision and has been ringing since the train left LaGrange, nine miles back; it was operated by a mechanical bell ringer. At the time of the accident it was daylight and clear and no condition existed that would have interfered with vision. The truck did not stop at any time after it came into his range of vision.

Conductor Bennett, who was in the caboose, stated that as they approached Crestwood at a speed of 35 or 40 miles per hour he felt an emergency application of the brake, and, sensing an accident, he noted that the time was between 5:44 and 5:45 a.m. He was unable to say whether the whistle had been sounded as they approached the crossing, and stated that he had been unable to locate any eyewitnesses to the accident.

Ray Gay, driver of the truck which was involved in the accident, stated that he is 25 years old, lives at Richmond, Kentucky, and is employed as a driver by Roy Watson of that city. He has been a driver for about 6 years and holds operator's license 990020. Accompanied by John Christopher, he left Richmond on the morning of October 15th at 1:30 a.m. with a load consisting of 12 head of cattle destined for Louisville. About 5:30 or 5:45 a.m. he arrived at Camden crossing, and just before reaching the point where he would leave route 146 he slowed down and placed the transmission lever in third gear. When he was about 15 feet from the rail farthest east he brought the truck to a stop and stepped out on the running board so as to get a view of the track north by looking over the top of the cab. Neither he nor Mr. Christopher noticed any train in sight, but when he attempted to start the truck he found that the motor was dead. The motor responded to the starter immediately and he started the truck over the crossing in first gear. When the cab and engine of the truck were about on the main track he heard the whistle of the locomotive for the first time and although he increased the speed of the truck he was unable to get clear of the track and the locomotive struck just behind the cab of his vehicle. He did not hear the locomotive bell ringing. He was unable to say at what speed the train approached the crossing, but estimated that not over $1\frac{1}{2}$ minutes elapsed between the time he looked up the track and the time of the accident. He stated that he was familiar with the route over which he was driving as he makes a trip over it almost every night.

The statement of John Christopher, who was accompanying Driver Gay, coincides with that of the truck driver in every detail except with respect to his observation of the track before the truck started to move over the crossing. Mr. Christopher stated that he looked only to the south of the truck.

Jesse Apple, who lives about 200 yards northwest of the crossing, was walking along the road near his house when he heard the whistle of Train First No. 73 being sounded as it approached the crossing. The whistling began when the train was about at the location of the whistling post for the crossing involved and continued almost to the crossing when it was suddenly changed to

a distress signal consisting of several short blasts. This attracted his attention and he looked around in time to see the collision. He went immediately to the debris of the truck and while there he heard the conductor of the train ask the driver whether he had looked up the track before crossing. To this question the driver had answered that the other man had looked and had said that there was nothing coming. Mr. Apple stated that the bell was ringing at the time of the accident.

C. E. Rice Jr., who is a claim agent for the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and lives about 4 miles from the scene of the accident, stated that most of the traffic between routes 22 and 146 follows the highway signs and crosses the tracks at the protected crossings near the station at Crestwood, but the crossing involved, which was originally the only connection between routes 22 and 146, is used by some of the residents of the vicinity. This latter crossing has no protection other than a standard cross-bar sign, about 8 feet high, located 15 to 18 feet east of the tracks on the north side of the crossing approach; this sign has lately been painted, and displays the word "Railroad" on one bar and the word "Crossing" on the other. A State law requires traffic to stop at those crossings which have been designated by the State Highway Commission as extra hazardous; at such crossings signs reading "Stop - Kentucky law" have been erected. The crossing where the accident occurred has not been so designated. Mr. Rice stated that he had information to the effect that the truck was loaded with 12 steers averaging 900 pounds each, and that Driver Gay had arrived at Richmond at 1:00 p.m., October 14th and at about 1:00 a.m., October 15th was called to make the trip which ended in the accident.

J. C. Nickerson, Division Engineer, stated that it was his opinion that only the engine truck was derailed as a result of the collision and that the final derailment did not occur until the engine reached the facing point switch leading to the house track. He understood that several years ago an attempt was made to close Camden crossing but the closure could not be effected because of the objection of the residents of the vicinity. He expressed the opinion that the crossing could be eliminated without inconveniencing the public, and also that if drainage could be provided it would be possible to construct an underpass which would eliminate all of the crossings in this vicinity.

Observations of the Commission's Inspectors

Examination of the crossing involved and of the track in the vicinity disclosed that a hole covering an area of about 2 by 2 feet and about 3 or 4 inches deep had been gouged out of the surfacing of the crossing by one of the wheels of the truck.

The first marks of derailment were flange marks which appeared on the right side of each rail at a point 103 feet south of the crossing. These marks continued on the ties until the facing point switch leading to the house track was reached.

Discussion

The evidence concerning the approach of the truck and Train First No. 73 to the intersection of the railroad and Camden crossing is contradictory so far as the statements of the engine crew and those of the occupants of the cab of the motor truck are concerned. Both members of the engine crew stated that the whistle was sounded almost continuously from a point approximately 800 feet north of the crossing until the crossing was reached, and the fireman stated that a mechanical ringer had kept the bell ringing since leaving the last station several miles back. The occupants of the truck cab stated that they did not hear either the bell or whistle until just a few seconds before the collision. The statements of the engine crew indicate that the truck did not stop before attempting to move over the crossing while those of the occupants of the cab of the truck were to the effect that not only did the truck stop just before reaching the tracks but that the engine died during the time the truck stood there. From the evidence, however, it is clearly established that the train was within the range of vision of the truck operator for at least several seconds prior to the accident, and if the truck had stopped it must have started its move upon the crossing after the train had come into view. There is evidence to corroborate the statements of the engine crew regarding the sounding of the whistle and the ringing of the bell. Excepting those involved in the accident there were no eyewitnesses to the operation of the truck as it approached the railroad.

An average of over thirty trains per day move over the crossings at Crestwood; a traffic check of Camden crossing showed an average of less than seven vehicles per hour using this crossing with a maximum of eighteen vehicles in any one hour. Since two other crossings which are protected by automatic warning devices are available to the public, the existence of this crossing constitutes a needless hazard to the railroad and the public alike and steps should be taken to eliminate it.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by a motor truck being driven upon a highway crossing at grade directly in front of an approaching train.

Respectfully submitted,
W. J. PATTERSON,
Director.