

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

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ACCIDENT ON THE  
MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD

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MAPESVILLE, ARK.

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SEPTEMBER 8, 1936.

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2093

SUMMARY

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Railroad:	Missouri Pacific
Date:	September 8, 1936.
Location:	Mabelvale, Ark.
Kind of accident:	Dérailment
Train involved:	Passenger
Train number:	No. 22
Engine number:	6615
Consist:	10 cars
Speed:	55-70 m.p.h.
Track:	Tangent and level.
Weather:	Clear
Time:	12:25 a.m.
Casualties:	1 killed and 19 injured.
Cause:	Train struck automobile which had turned off the highway just before reaching a crossing and had become stalled on the track.

October 7, 1936

## To the Commission

On September 8, 1936, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Mabelvale, Ark., as a result of striking an automobile, this accident resulting in the death of 1 trespasser and the injury of 17 passengers and 2 employees.

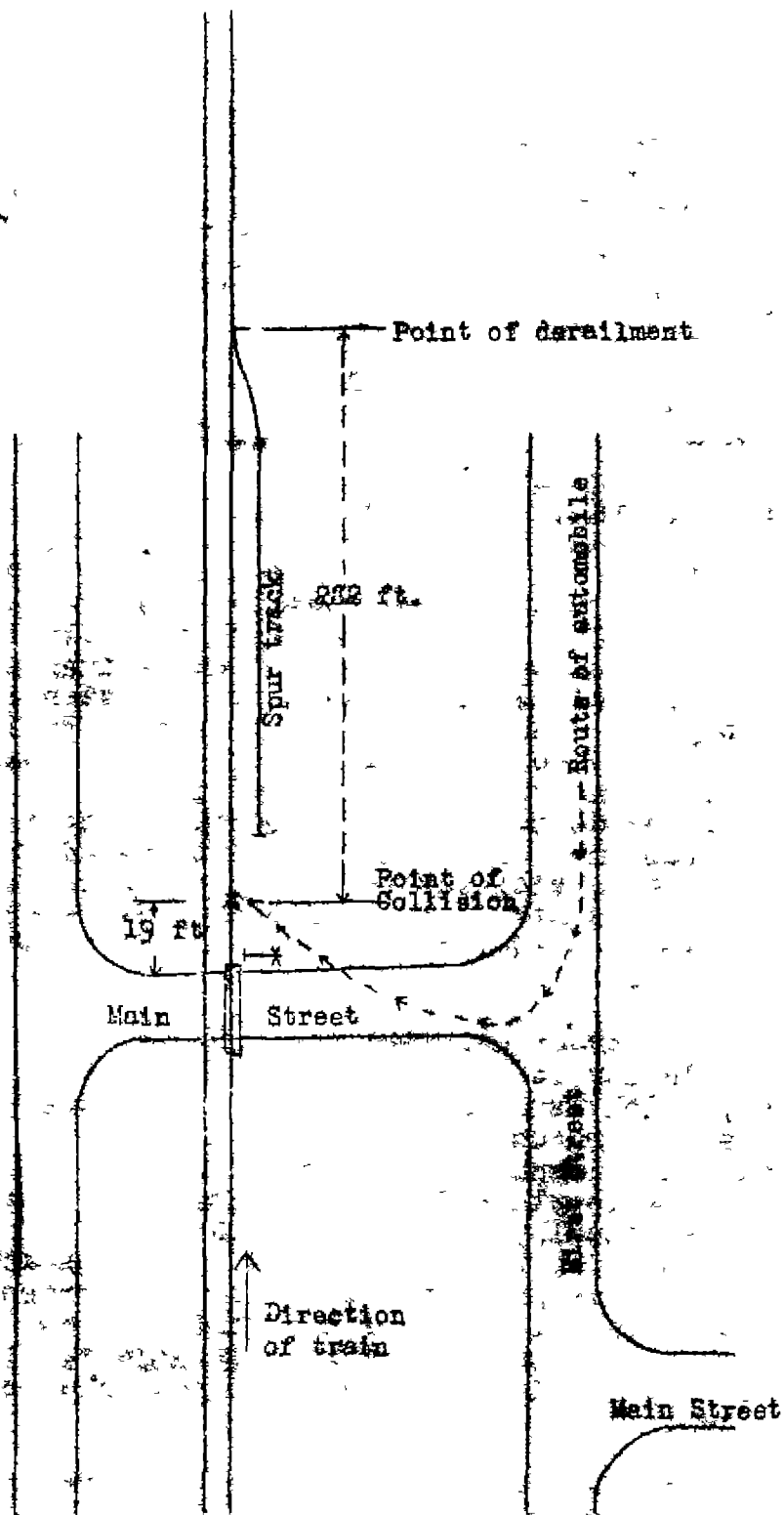
## Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Little Rock District of the Arkansas Division which extends between North Little Rock and Texarkana, Ark., a distance of 146.5 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train order and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point 19 feet north of the Main Street crossing at Mabelvale. Approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of approximately 1 mile, this tangent extending for some distance beyond. The grade for north-bound trains is level for a distance of 1,000 feet, 0.112 percent ascending for a distance of 500 feet and then level for a distance of 300 feet to the point of accident. A whistle board is located 1,318 feet south of the crossing and the maximum authorized speed for passenger trains in this vicinity is 70 miles per hour. A trailing-point switch located 317 feet north of the crossing leads to a spur track, 278 feet in length, which parallels the north-bound track on the east.

First Street parallels the tracks on the east and intersects Main Street at a point 125 feet from the crossing. Main Street, which is a gravel road approximately 25 feet in width, crosses the tracks at right angles. At the crossing the gravel is laid on an asphalt base, with the exception that the north-bound track is planked. The crossing is in good condition and is practically level, although there is a descent of about 4 inches between the north-bound and the south-bound tracks. The crossing is protected by a standard crossing sign of the cross-bar type, located at the northeast corner of the crossing and bearing the words "RAILROAD CROSSING". The driver of a vehicle approaching from the east has an unobstructed view of this sign.

The weather was clear and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 12 25 a.m.

N. Little Rock, Ar  
 11.28 mi.  
 Mabelvale  
 Point of accident  
 135.26 mi.  
 Tennessee, Ark.



Inv. No. 2093  
 Missouri Pacific R.R.  
 Mabelvale, Ark.  
 September 8, 1936.

### Description

Train No. 22, a north-bound passenger train, consisted of 1 mail and express car, 1 baggage car, 2 coaches, 1 chair car, 3 Pullman sleeping cars, 1 dining car, and 1 Pullman sleeping car in the order named, all of steel construction, and hauled by engine 6615, and was in charge of Conductor Reeser and Engineman Kenney. This train passed Hot Springs Junction, 13.28 miles south of Mabelvale, and the last open office, at 12:08 a.m., according to the train sheet, 33 minutes late, and on passing through Mabelvale struck an automobile standing on the track near the Main Street crossing while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 55 and 70 miles per hour.

The automobile involved was a Plymouth, 4-door sedan, 1935 model, owned and driven by H. H. Boyd, who lives near Mabelvale. It had been proceeding southward on First Street, turned to the right onto Main Street and then turned off the highway at an angle and proceeded onto the tracks at a point 19 feet north of the crossing, stopping with the front wheels against the west rail of the north-bound track and the rear wheels close to the shoulder, where it was standing when struck by Train No. 22.

The automobile was carried on the pilot beam of the engine, the engine becoming derailed when some part of the automobile came in contact with the filler block of the switch frog located approximately 282 feet beyond, the engine stopped in a badly damaged condition, on its left side diagonally across the south-bound track, with its front end 1,027 feet beyond the point of collision. The automobile was demolished, with the body hanging from the lead pair of wheels of the engine truck. The tender and first five cars were derailed, stopping in zigzag positions across both main tracks; the next three cars were also derailed but remained in general line with the track. The last two cars were not derailed or damaged. The employees injured were the engineman and fireman.

### Summary of evidence

Engineman Kenney, of Train No. 22, stated that on approaching Mabelvale he sounded the crossing whistle signal, the engine bell was ringing, the headlight was burning and he was operating the train at a speed of about 60 miles per hour. When about 50 feet from the crossing he saw a man on the track at the edge of the crossing violently waving a hat or newspaper, and he saw an automobile beyond the crossing with its front wheels between the rails. He immediately applied the air brakes in emergency and the collision followed. He stated that the

reason he did not see the automobile sooner was that lights were shining on the crossing and the automobile was in the darkness beyond the crossing.

Fireman Kelley, of Train No. 22, stated that he saw the man on the crossing giving stop signals when the engine was about 30 feet from the crossing, but he did not see the automobile until just before it was struck, as the glare from the headlights of an automobile which was standing headed toward him on the left side of the crossing, obscured his vision. Conductor Reeser estimated the speed of his train to have been between 65 and 70 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Flagman Linscott, of Train No. 22, stated that he was in the second car from the rear at the time of the accident and as he left the train after it stopped he stepped on an automobile hood. As he walked back towards the crossing he saw marks between the rails about 20 feet north of the crossing indicating where the train had struck the automobile, and there was a hole in the ballast shoulder on the east side of the track which he was informed had been made by the automobile which had been standing there before it was struck by the train. Mr. Strayer, an eyewitness of the accident, then told him that the driver of the automobile had missed the crossing, had driven over the rail and could not get the car off. Mr. Strayer tried to help him but on seeing the train approaching he told the driver to get out and then tried to flag the train with his hat. Flagman Linscott stated that he also talked with Mr. Boyd, the driver of the automobile, who also told him that he was off the crossing and upon the track, that the battery was down, the car was stalled and he could not move it. Flagman Linscott further stated that while Mr. Boyd was nervous and excited, he did not appear to be under the influence of liquor.

H. H. Boyd, driver of the automobile, stated that he had been attending a Labor Day picnic, which was held a short distance from the crossing. He left the picnic grounds soon after midnight, proceeded southward on First Street and turned onto Main Street toward the crossing. He stated that he was not driving very fast and for some reason, as he reached the crossing, his engine died. He did not see a train approaching nor did he hear one. After making several attempts to start the motor he got out and tried to push the automobile off the track and about this time a man by the name of Strayer came up and tried to help him. Boyd said he then got into the car again and tried to start the motor when Mr. Strayer called that a train was approaching, he then got out of the car and walked eastward while Strayer proceeded a short distance toward the train to flag it. Another man also tried to flag the train. He then heard the train whistling but did not know how many times the whistle was sounded. He stated that his car stopped in the middle of the crossing and that there was nothing about the condition of the crossing to

cause his automobile to become stalled, but he had been having motor trouble for some time, he had had several mechanics working on the car, but they had been unable to locate the trouble. Mr. Boyd was positive he did not drive his car on the track north of the crossing, but that it stopped on the crossing; he was unable to explain, however, why he and Mr. Strayer were unable to push the car off the crossing except to say that he might have left it in gear, he did not think the brakes were left applied, and said that the headlights on his car were in good condition. Mr. Boyd further stated that he was familiar with the crossing and was sober at the time of the accident and that he had not had any intoxicating liquor that day nor had he been in any of the beer parlors in that vicinity. He also stated that he did not talk with any member of the crew after the accident, just as soon as the derailment occurred he walked back to the picnic grounds and was then driven to his home.

H. C. Strayer, a resident of Mabelvale, stated that the picnic was held about 3 blocks northeast of the tracks and he was on his way home from the picnic when he saw the automobile stalled on the crossing headed west with the headlights burning, and the driver was trying to push it off. He tried to help him, but they were unable to move it, and he then saw the approaching train and immediately started down the track, flagging with his hat and he reached a point about 150 feet south of the crossing. He did not hear the engineman answer his signals nor did he hear the engineman sound the crossing whistle, and he did not know whether or not the engine bell was ringing, although he stated that, due to his excitement, he may not have heard them even if they were sounded. Mr. Strayer stated that he did not see any lights around the crossing that might have blinded the driver of an automobile approaching the crossing, and he was unable to say whether or not the driver of the car had been drinking. He was not acquainted with him.

J. A. Crandall, who resides on the west side of the tracks about opposite the point of accident, stated that when he went out on his porch he saw an automobile stalled on the track about 25 or 30 feet north of the crossing. Some boys had stopped their automobile west of the tracks with the headlights shining toward the crossing, and the stalled automobile was north of the crossing sign with but one headlight burning. He heard the motor running, heard the wheels spinning, and about that time saw the reflection of the headlight of the train. He did not know how long the automobile had been stalled, but it was not there when he came home about 30 minutes previously. He saw Mr. Strayer walk southward across the crossing and flag the train when it was about 50 feet south of the crossing, and he heard the regular crossing whistle signal as the train approached. Mr. Crandall stated that after the accident he saw

where gravel had been thrown against the east or outside rail of the north-bound track at the point where the wheels had been spinning, and the next morning he clearly saw the wheel tracks of the automobile where it had left the highway and traveled through the grass to the track. Mr. Crandall was acquainted with Mr. Boyd by sight. He did not see him at the picnic, although he understood he had been there, but about 11 p.m. he saw him at a beer parlor and he saw Mr. Boyd drinking beer and from his actions he appeared to be intoxicated.

Mr. J. B. Matthews, who accompanied Mr. Crandall to his home around midnight, stated that about 30 minutes later, when he started out on the highway from the Crandall home with the intention of driving over the crossing, he saw the headlight of the approaching train and stopped his automobile about 15 feet from the tracks with his headlights shining diagonally over the crossing, and he saw the stalled automobile about 20 feet north of the crossing and the headlights were not burning. Mr. Matthews further stated that the marks where the automobile had been driven through the grass and upon the track were plainly visible. There were marks in the center of the track indicating where the automobile had been struck and dragged along on the track until the engine became derailed. Walter Bell, who was with Mr. Matthews, stated that while the stalled automobile was to the left of their own car when they stopped west of the crossing, he thought that the car was on the crossing. He also tried to flag the train.

The statements of J. C. Courtney, a resident of Mabelvale, corroborated those of Crandall and Matthews as to the wheel marks in the grass between the highway and the north-bound track.

Section Foreman Roberts, in charge of the section on which this accident occurred, inspected the track on the morning following the accident, and found well defined marks leading from the highway about 43 feet east of the track; these wheel tracks were through high grass and led to the track where the front wheels of the automobile went over the east rail at a point about 30 feet north of the center of the crossing. The marks in the ballast indicated that the rear wheels had been spinning backward, throwing loose gravel up against the rail.

Inspection of the track by the Commission's inspectors revealed the marks in the grass and on the track north of the crossing as described by eyewitnesses and the section foreman. There was also a mark on the outside of the ball of the east rail of the north-bound track, 19 feet north of the crossing, which was left by the tire of the automobile when it passed over the rail; a similar mark was located approximately 5 feet



north of these marks and it was approximately the width of the tread of the automobile tire. Similar marks were also found slightly north of, and in line with, these marks on the gauge side of the west rail. Heavy abrasions were found on the ties between the rails approximately 9 feet north thereof, and continued for a distance of 273 feet to the point where the engine encountered the trailing point switch leading to a spur track. Inspection of the crossing and the track south thereof did not reveal any marks indicating that there had been anything dragging between or outside of the rails.

Subsequent to the accident a twenty-four hour check of traffic was made at this crossing and it was found that a total of 287 motor vehicles passed over this crossing during that time.

There is now a change under consideration involving the re-location of this crossing, which when completed, will move the crossing 114 feet south of its present location. The change, however, will not eliminate the turns necessary to pass over the crossing.

#### Discussion

The evidence indicates that the driver of the automobile, on making the turn to the right from First Street onto Main Street, apparently continued on toward the right, leaving the highway at a point about 45 feet from the tracks and continuing in a slightly diagonal direction until the front wheels had passed over the east rail of the north-bound track where the car became stalled. The driver made several attempts to get the car off the track and was assisted by a passerby who, on seeing the approaching train, attempted to flag it but had proceeded only a short distance south of the crossing when the engine passed him. The engineman sounded the crossing whistle signal and he saw the man flagging when about 50 feet from the crossing and he had merely time to apply the brakes in emergency before the collision occurred.

The driver of the automobile stated that he had not been drinking that evening and the statements of several of the witnesses who talked with Mr. Boyd at the time of the accident, were to the effect that he was sober and there was no evidence of his having been drinking. One witness, however, stated that he saw Mr. Boyd drinking beer about 11 p.m. that evening. While his condition as he approached the crossing, cannot be definitely stated, it is apparent that Mr. Boyd was not fully alert as to his driving or he would not have missed the crossing and proceeded upon the track to one side.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by a train striking an automobile which had turned off the highway and had become stalled on the track.

Respectfully submitted,

M. J. PATTERSON,

Director.