

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD AT WEEHAWKEN,
N. J., ON FEBRUARY 21, 1934.

April 26, 1934.

To the Commission:

On February 21, 1934, there was a derailment of an empty baggage car in a switching movement at Weehawken, N.J., which resulted in the death of one employee. This accident was investigated in conjunction with the New Jersey Board of Public Utility Commissioners.

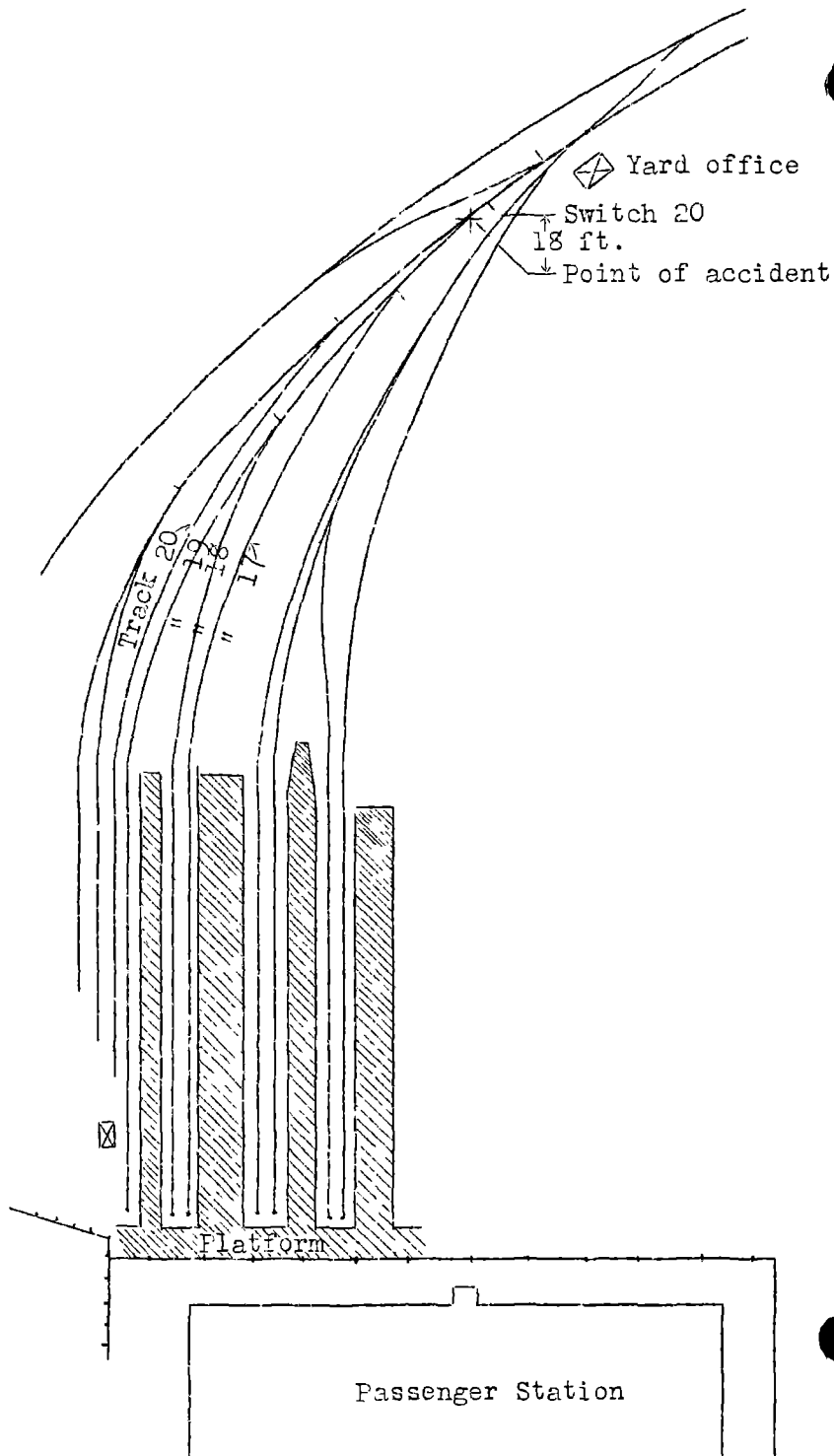
Location and method of operation

At Weehawken there are numerous tracks leading to the passenger station; these tracks extend northward, curve to the right and converge into a double-track line at a point about 1,300 feet north of the station. The station tracks are numbered from east to west; the accident occurred within yard limits at the junction switch of tracks 17 and 20, located about 1,100 feet north of the station, near the yard office; this is a manually operated facing-point switch for southward movements, known as switch 20, and normally is lined for track 17. The low switch stand is of the no. 7 New Century type, model 51-A, located on the east side of the tracks; it is equipped with a switch lamp and the center of the lens is 20 inches above the top of the stand. Night indications are white when the switch is in normal position, and yellow when it is reversed. The switches in the immediate vicinity are handled by switch tenders.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:05 a.m.

Description

Switch Engine 625 was in charge of Conductor Urschel and Engineman Griffin. At the time of the accident it was making a back-up movement southward, shoving two baggage cars with the air brakes coupled, it being intended to back the cars in on track 17. While passing over switch 20 at a speed of about 3 or 7 miles per hour, the forward truck of the lead car was derailed at a point 18 feet south of the switch points, resulting in the air hose parting between the two cars and causing the air brakes to apply in emergency and the equipment to come to a sudden stop.



Inv. No. 1893
New York Central R.R.,
Weehawken, N.J.
Feb. 21, 1934

Only the forward truck of the lead car was derailed and it ran a distance of 148 feet after being derailed. The employee killed was a brakeman, who had been riding on the forward end of the lead car and who apparently was thrown or fell off and under the car.

Summary of evidence

Within a period of $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours prior to the accident, there were only two movements made over switch 20, both of these being trailing-point movements. The first of these was made by Train No. 27, which departed from Weehawken passenger station at 1:35 a.m., 15 minutes late, moving via station track 19, thence to tracks 18 and 17 and over switch 20, and at that time the switch apparently was in normal position. Switch engine 601, headed north, without cars, in charge of Conductor Carey and Engineman Kuhn, stood on track 20 just south of the switch, and about 15 or 20 minutes after Train No. 27 had departed, engine 601 passed over switch 20, moving northward; the next time the switch was used was when the accident occurred.

Engineman Griffin, of engine 625, stated that the first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when the air brakes were applied in emergency, at which time the engine was working steam and the speed about 6 miles per hour. Neither Engineman Griffin or Fireman Scharf saw the indication displayed by the switch lamp on switch 20, nor did they examine the switch after the accident. Conductor Urschel and Brakeman Bailey were not with engine 625 at the time of the accident, being occupied with other duties; within 15 minutes after the accident, however, the conductor examined the switch and found the switch points open from the west side, with the throw lever latched and the switch lamp displaying a white indication. In his opinion the switch had been run through by some previous movement. Brakeman Bailey did not examine the switch after the accident, but he saw the switch lamp displaying a white indication.

Supervisor of Track Smith stated that on examining the switch after the accident he definitely ascertained that it had been run through by a northward movement off track 20 while it was lined for track 17, saying that had it been run through by a northward movement off track 17 while reversed, the switch points would have been in a somewhat different position, the switch lever would have been on the opposite side of the switch stand, and the twist in the spindle on which the lamp is mounted would have been in the opposite direction. This spindle is so arranged that the lamp can be placed upon it only in one position, thus precluding the possibility of its displaying a false indication for the movement intended.

Assistant Superintendent O'Connor arrived at the scene of the accident before the equipment was moved and his examination disclosed the west switch point to be open about 1 inch, instead of being tight against the rail; the switch lamp was lighted and displaying a white indication, and the switch lever was in the socket and latched.

Engineman Kuhn, of engine 601, stated that his engine backed southward over switch 20 about 10 minutes before Train No. 27 departed and stopped on track 20. When Train No. 27 passed over the switch the indication was white, indicating that switch 20 was then lined for track 17. Later on, however, just before his engine moved northward over the switch, he saw the switchtender throw the switch and then give a proceed signal, and the engineman claimed that he saw the indication displayed by the switch lamp change from white to yellow; he was unable to say how the switch came to be damaged. Fireman MacGregor stated that he was on his seat box when his engine moved northward over switch 20; he did not see the switch tender give the proceed signal nor did he see the position of the switch, and when his engine passed over it he did not notice anything to indicate that his engine ran through it.

Conductor Carey, of engine 601, stated that he did not know anything about the position of switch 20 when Train No. 27 passed over it, but at the time his own engine moved over it he was about 100 feet north of the switch and he said that he then saw the switch lamp displaying a yellow indication, indicating that the switch was lined for track 20 at that time, and he heard no unusual noise such as would have been made had the switch been lined for track 17 and then run through by his engine. At the same time, however, Conductor Carey said that the switch evidently was properly lined for Train No. 27, and that train and his own engine were the only two movements that could have run through the switch prior to the accident.

Switchtender Terns stated that after Train No. 27 passed he threw the switch for engine 601 to head out from track 20 and after he threw the switch the lamp displayed a yellow indication; he did not touch the switch again until after the accident. Before engine 625 and the two cars approached, however, he looked at switch 20 and saw that both the switch target and lamp displayed white indications, but he did not know who had restored the switch to its normal position.

Switchtender Quinn stated that the switch could have been run through only by Train No. 27 or engine 601 and he was positive that the switch was properly lined for Train No. 27 when

that train passed over it, with the switch lamp displaying a white indication. Switchtender Quinn did not see the indication displayed by the switch lamp when engine 601 moved northward as he was then in the shanty, but he came to the door and looked out just before engine 625 arrived and the switch lamp then was displaying a white indication. He did not handle the switch himself, saying that Switchtender Terns lined it for engine 601, and he did not know whether it was properly lined for that movement.

Switchtender Garfney did not actually see switch 20 lined for engine 601 after Train No. 27 passed, but he said that he came out of the passenger yard office at the time engine 601 was making the movement and the indication displayed by the switch lamp was yellow; he did not know what the position of the switch was when Train No. 27 passed over it.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the damaged condition of a facing-point switch, which had been run through by a previous movement.

Members of the crew of engine 601 said that switch 20 was reversed, with the switch lamp displaying a yellow indication, when their engine moved over it. On the other hand, however, the evidence is clear that the switch was properly lined for Train No. 27 and that engine 601 was the only engine to use the switch between the time Train No. 27 departed and the time of the accident, and examination of the switch after the accident showed conclusively that it had been run through while in normal position. Under these circumstances it is believed that Switchtender Terns did not line the switch for engine 601 and that the crew of that engine were mistaken in their statements that the switch had been lined for the movement of their engine.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.