

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

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ACCIDENT ON THE  
PERE MARQUETTE RAILWAY

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MICHIGAN CITY, IND.

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MARCH 7, 1937

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2157

-2-

Summary

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Inv-2157

Railroad:	Pere Marquette
Date:	March 7, 1937
Location:	Michigan City, Ind.
Kind of accident:	Derailement
Train involved:	Freight
Train number:	56, CDS-6
Engine number:	1032
Consist:	42 cars and caboose
Speed:	45-50 m.p.h.
Track:	Tangent; grade 0.1 percent descending eastward.
Weather:	Rain
Time:	11:35 p.m.
Casualties:	5 injured
Cause:	Kinked track; track reported suitable for service when proper repairs had not been made.

To the Commission:

On March 7, 1937, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Pere Marquette Railway, near Michigan City, Ind., which resulted in the injury of five employees. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Public Service Commission of Indiana.

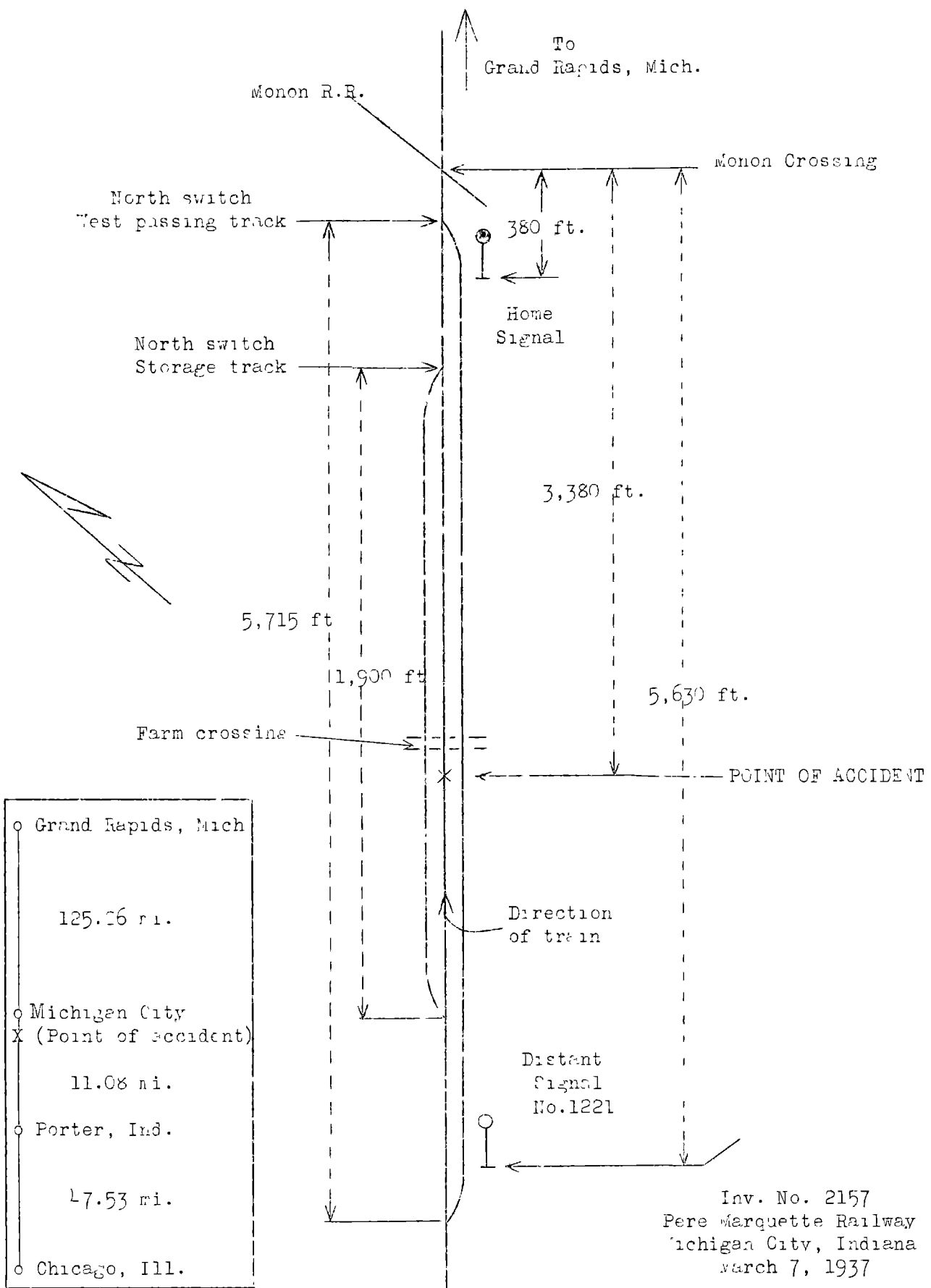
#### Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Sub-Division No. 1 of the Chicago-Petoskey Division, extending between Porter, Ind., and Grand Rapids, Mich., a distance of 136.34 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident, this is a single track line over which trains are operated by time table, train orders and an automatic block signal system. The track is laid with 110 pound rails, 39 feet in length, with 24 treated hardwood ties to the rail length, fully tie plated, single spiked, with four rail anchors per rail and ballasted with from 10 to 12 inches of washed gravel, and is well maintained. The accident occurred at a point about 1 1/2 miles west of the station at Michigan City. Approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for more than 2 miles to the point of accident and for some distance beyond; the grade for east-bound trains is slightly descending, being 0.1 percent at the point of accident.

The Chicago, Indianapolis and Louisville Railway, hereinafter designated as the Monon, crosses the Pere Marquette track at a point 4,532 feet west of the station at Michigan City, this crossing being protected by an interlocking plant. The point of derailment was 5,360 feet west of the crossing. A farm road crosses the Pere Marquette tracks at a point about 3,500 feet west of the Monon crossing. The east switch of the west passing track is operated from the interlocking tower and is located just west of the crossing; this passing track is 5,715 feet in length and parallels the main track on the south.

The maximum authorized speed for trains other than passenger trains is 40 miles per hour, but a special timetable rule permits a maximum speed of 50 miles per hour for Train No. 56.

It was raining at the time of accident, which occurred about 11:35 p.m.



o Grand Rapids, Mich
125.26 mi.
o Michigan City X (Point of accident)
11.08 mi.
o Porter, Ind.
47.53 mi.
o Chicago, Ill.

Inv. No. 2157  
 Pere Marquette Railway  
 Michigan City, Indiana  
 March 7, 1937

### Description

Train No. 56, an east-bound second class freight train, consisted of 42 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1032, and was in charge of Conductor Galimore and Engineman Bekkering. This train left Porter at 11:15 p.m., one hour late, according to the train sheet and while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 45 and 50 miles per hour, was derailed at about 11:35 p.m. due to the track having been thrown out of line by a drawbar which dropped from a car in preceding freight train, Extra 1019 East. The engine, tender and the first 24 cars of the train were derailed; the engine and tender stopped approximately 600 feet east of the initial point of derailment, upright and with the front end of the engine headed slightly toward the north and the tender fouling the west passing track. The first car remained upright, to the north of the main track; the following 20 cars stopped in various positions within a space of approximately 300 feet; the 22nd and 23rd cars remained upright, while the lead truck of the 25th car was also derailed; 11 cars were destroyed.

The employees injured were the engineman, fireman, conductor, front brakeman and rear brakeman of Train No. 56.

### Summary of evidence

Engineman Bekkering of Train No. 56 stated that his train left Porter about 11:20 p.m.; as it approached the Monon interlocking plant at Michigan City, both the distant and the home signals were displaying proceed indications and these indications were called by members of the crew who were on the engine. As he was watching the home signal, he did not observe anything wrong with the track, nor did others on the engine indicate that they had noticed anything unusual. The first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when the engine lurched as it left the rails. He estimated the speed of the train at that time to have been between 45 and 50 miles per hour. The proper air tests were made at Rockwell Street Yard and at Indiana Harbor and the brakes functioned properly enroute. There was a misty rain and the visibility was fair at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:35 p.m.

Head Brakeman Stites, of Train No. 56, stated that approaching Michigan City, he was on the left side of the engine with the side window open. The headlight was illuminating the track ahead and although it was dark and raining, he had no difficulty in seeing ahead. When about 3 or 4 car lengths from the damaged track, and while the train was moving at a speed of at least 45 miles per hour, he observed that the track was out of

line; however, it was then too late to warn the engineman and the engine became derailed almost immediately.

The statements of Fireman Throckmorton, of Train No. 56, agreed with those of Brakeman Stites regarding signal indications and speed approaching Michigan City, but he did not notice anything wrong with the track.

Engineman Priest, of Extra 1019 East, the train having the damaged drawbar, stated that approaching the interlocking plant at Monon Crossing, he applied the train brakes in order to control his train in accordance with a caution indication displayed by the home signal. When the speed had been reduced to about 20 miles per hour, he attempted to release the brakes but was unable to do so and the train stopped at about 7:30 p.m. Investigation developed that the draft gear and end-sill had been pulled out of the west end of the 47th car in his train. After disposing of the head end of his train and the damaged car, by placing them on sidings controlled from the interlocking plant, the drawbar was removed from the track with a chain. The drawbar was lying on the track near the head car in the rear portion of this train and there was a plank, evidently torn from a highway crossing, lying under the drawbar. While moving over the track in reassembling his train, he felt a decided jerk of the engine and upon examination it was found that the track was from 12 to 14 inches out of line at a point about 6 car lengths west of where the drawbar was found and about 3 car lengths west of the private crossing. When the rear portion of the train was pulled up to the interlocking tower, the conductor reported the damaged condition of the track to the dispatcher. Engineman Priest thought that the drawbar had dropped upon the track and was then dragged or pushed for about 2 or 3 car lengths, resulting in throwing the track out of line.

The statement of Conductor Gabrion, of Extra 1019, was substantially the same as that of Engineman Priest. Conductor Gabrion further stated that he made a careful examination of the track and found it to be from 12 to 16 inches out of line at a point about 12 car lengths west of where the draft gear had been removed from the track and about 60 feet west of the farm road crossing. He reported this condition to the train dispatcher.

Section Foreman Sonnenberg stated that he has been a section foreman for more than 18 years. About 9:35 p.m., on the night of the accident, the operator at Monon tower informed him by telephone that an extra had pulled out a drawbar on the main track at about the middle of the west passing track and that as a result, the track had been thrown about a foot out of line. Foreman Sonnenberg called some of his men, loaded tools in his automobile, and drove to the vicinity indicated in the message.

He found the drawbar on the north side of the main track, and made an inspection of the track westward for a distance of approximately 200 feet, but did not discover any signs of damage to the track. During this inspection he did not examine the farm crossing which is at approximately the half-way point in the passing track, nor did he inspect the track west of the crossing as he did not think the drawbar was pulled west of the crossing, and there were no marks of dragging equipment that he could distinguish by lantern light. He said that had there been any marks on the track he would have followed them back. Although the operator had told him that the train crew had reported the track as being out of line about a foot, he did not find any such condition and after this inspection was made he concluded that the track was all right and went back to the tower. He was called later, on account of the derailment of Train No. 56, but at that time the track was badly damaged; he walked the entire length of the train and did not notice any place where the track was kinked, but could find no other reason for the derailment.

Operator Huber, who was on duty at Monon tower, stated that Extra 1019 stopped at the east-bound home signal at about 7:25 p.m. A drawbar was pulled out and he was engaged in operating the interlocking while the head end of the train was set on the west passing track and the damaged car was placed upon another track. During this time the conductor came into the tower and talked with the dispatcher over the telephone, but as the operator was busy he did not remember what was said. At about 9:35 p.m. he received a message from the dispatcher, addressed to the section foreman, advising him of a kink in the track and directing him to repair the track and advise; he stated that he telephoned this message to Section Foreman Sonnenberg. At about 10:45 p.m. Section Foreman Sonnenberg came to the office and said that there was no damage such as had been reported. The operator then reported this conversation to the dispatcher, by telephone, who asked if the track was safe for usual speed and the section foreman stated that it was; the operator then so advised the dispatcher. After this telephone conversation, the section foreman dictated a message to the dispatcher, which the operator copied, stating that the track was safe for usual speed where Extra 1019 pulled drawbar. Operator Huber said it did not occur to him that possibly the section foreman had not made a proper inspection or inspected the track in the proper location. As Train No. 56 approached he could tell when it passed the distant signal; the first indication he had that anything was wrong was when he saw the headlight beam pointing toward the northeast.

Train Dispatcher Keller, on duty at Grand Rapids, stated that about 9:30 p.m. he received a verbal report from Conductor Gabrion, of Extra 1019, to the effect that the main track was about 12 inches out of line at a point about midway between the passing track switches at Michigan City and that it would be necessary to run trains through the passing track until the main track was repaired. Upon receipt of this information he issued form 19 order No. 67 to all trains, to use the passing track at Michigan City instead of the main track. He then notified the section foreman at Michigan City regarding the damaged track, by issuing a message reading: "Main track out of line about a foot. Short kink in track about middle of west passing track Michigan City; repair and advise." At about 10:55 p.m. the operator at Monon tower notified him that the section foreman reported that the track was all right for usual speed. He then asked the foreman if it was necessary to issue a slow order and he said a slow order was not required as the conductor's report was in error and the track was not out of line. Dispatcher Keller thereupon annulled the order for trains to use the west siding and restored the main track to normal service. He stated that in his message to the section foreman he gave the location of the reported damage to the track, and when the section foreman reported the track to be in safe condition, he accepted it as authentic information and did not question whether or not the track had been inspected at the proper location.

Examination of the track after the accident disclosed that the first marks of derailment were on the inside of the south rail, near a joint located about 78 feet west of the farm crossing. Marks of abrasion were continuous in the center of the track from a point about 50 feet west of the crossing, up to the crossing, and east of that point the track was demolished. There were no marks of dragging equipment west of the point of derailment.

#### Discussion

The investigation of this accident disclosed that the main track near Michigan City was thrown out of alignment by a draft gear and end-sill dropping from a car in train Extra 1019. This damage to the track was reported by the conductor of Extra 1019 to the dispatcher who removed the main track from service and reported its damaged condition to the section foreman at Michigan City.

The section foreman, with men and tools, went to the vicinity indicated in the report, and after locating the draft gear which had failed, he examined the track for about 200 feet westward from that point and failing to find any serious damage



to the track he reported it safe for movements at the usual speed, and the dispatcher restored the track to service with the result that Train No. 56, the first train to use the track thereafter, was derailed.

The statements of the crew of Extra 1019 indicate that the draft gear was dragged a distance of from 6 to 12 car lengths after it dropped; assuming that the damage to the track occurred at the point where the draft gear fell, the shortest of these estimated distances would locate that point at about 300 feet west of the place where the draft gear was removed from the track, or about 100 feet west of the farm crossing. Section Foreman Sonnenberg stated that during the course of his inspection he did not go west of the farm crossing; the first marks of derailment were afterwards found at a point 78 feet west of the crossing and this point was well within the limits given in the statements of the crew of Extra 1019, and the message from the dispatcher to the section foreman.

While neither Dispatcher Keller nor Operator Huber can be criticized for dereliction of duty, yet in view of the positive and definite report made by Conductor Gabrion, it appears that the receipt of Section Foreman Sonnenberg's contradictory report should have been sufficient to prompt them to make further inquiries regarding his failure to locate the damaged track.

#### Conclusion

This accident was caused by kinked track, and failure to make proper inspection and repairs after the track had been reported as being in damaged condition.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.