

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY
CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY AT HOPEWELL, FLA.,
ON SEPTEMBER 21, 1932.

November 17, 1932.

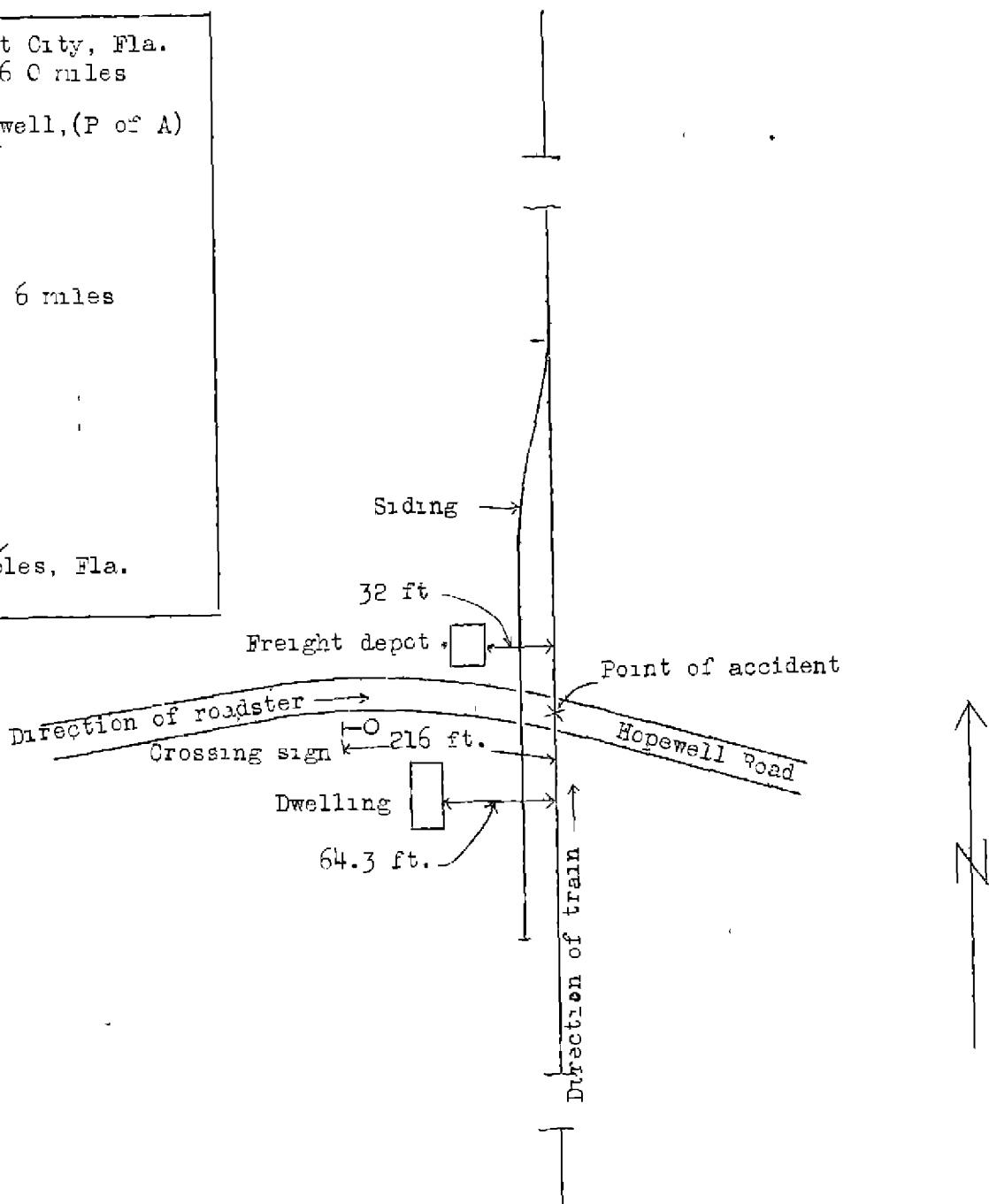
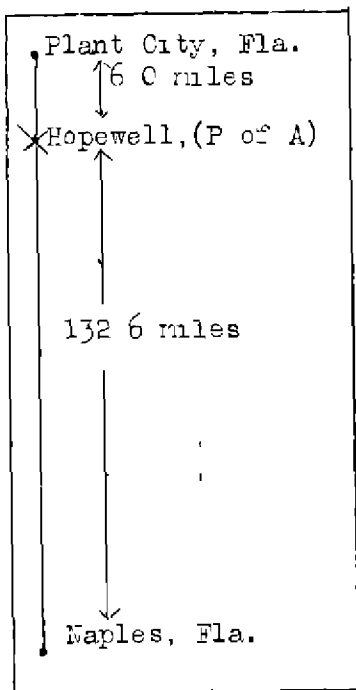
To the Commission.

On September 21, 1932, an automobile ran into the side of a freight train at a highway grade crossing on the Seaboard Air Line Railway at Hopewell, Fla., partly derailing the train and resulting in the death of one occupant of the automobile and injury to the driver thereof, as well as the injury of three railroad employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Fort Myers Subdivision of the South Florida Division, extending between Naples and Plant City, Fla., a distance of 138.6 miles, on that part of this subdivision extending between welcome Junction and Plant City, within which territory this accident occurred, there are no scheduled trains and the line is seldom used except by a switching run serving various industries. Trains generally are operated over this single-track line by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at Hopewell Road, a paved public highway crossing at grade, which crosses, from west to east, first a siding and then the main track. The railroad runs north and south, approaching the crossing from the south, the railroad track is tangent for about 1 mile, this tangent extending north of the crossing for more than 3,400 feet; the grade is 0.1 per cent ascending for northbound trains at the crossing.

Approaching the crossing from the west, the highway curves to the right starting at a point 380 feet from the main track and ending at the crossing, while the grade is nearly level. There is a circular crossing warning sign, having a white background and divided into quarters by heavy painted black lines, with the letter "R" appearing in each upper quarter of the circle. This sign is mounted on a post located south of the highway at a point 216 feet west of the main track, there is also a standard Seaboard Air Line crossing sign 18 feet east of the track, this being of the crossed-bar type. There is a building on the south side of the highway, 50 feet therefrom and 64.3 feet west of the main track, after passing this building a clear view could have been had of the track from the direction in which the train was approaching for at least one-half mile, as no freight cars stood on the siding south of the



Inv. No 1785
Seaboard Air Line Ry ,
Hopewell, Florida
Sept 21, 1932

crossing. The highway consists of a 16-foot hard-surfaced road with 5-foot dirt shoulders, and was in condition for the movement of traffic at high speed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1.15 p.m.

Description

Freight train extra 303, a switching local, consisting of 17 loaded freight cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 303, was in charge of Conductor Hayman and Engineman Forbes. This train was making a back-up movement over the crossing at Hopewell at a speed of about 12 to 15 miles per hour when either the caboose or the car next to it was struck by the automobile.

The automobile was an Oakland roadster, 1928 model, six cylinders, equipped with four-wheel mechanical brakes and driven by Jewett Pollock. It was proceeding eastward on Hopewell Road at a speed estimated to have been about 35 miles per hour. On nearing the crossing, however, the driver observed the train approaching and made an attempt to stop, but it was then too late, and the automobile ran into the side of the train.

The automobile was thrown about 30 feet and stopped bottom up, completely demolished. The caboose and four rear cars were derailed, the caboose stopping about 210 feet north of the crossing, reversed and on its side, in a badly-damaged condition, while two of the cars were practically demolished. On account of this damage resulting from the derailment the exact point at which the automobile struck the train could not be determined definitely. The employees injured were the conductor, brakeman and flagman, all of whom were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Hayman stated that he was standing in the back door of the caboose while the back-up movement was being made a speed of about 12 to 15 miles per hour, with Brakeman Pearson and Flagman Wolfe on the platform, Flagman Wolfe handling the back-up hose, which was equipped with a brake valve and an air whistle. The station signal was sounded on the engine whistle for Hopewell and Flagman Wolfe sounded the air whistle continuously from a point about 300 feet south of the crossing. On nearing the crossing the conductor observed an automobile truck approaching from the east and also the roadster from the west, the truck passed over the crossing when the caboose was within 225 feet of it, but at this time the roadster was some distance away, possibly 900 to 1,200 feet from the crossing. He could not estimate the speed of the roadster, but did not think it would reach the crossing before the train, saying

that it was about 200 feet from the crossing when he last saw it and at that time the caboose was about one car-length from the crossing. It did not occur to him that the roadster might run into the side of the train, in his opinion it was then far enough from the crossing to afford ample opportunity for the driver to stop, and the first he knew of anything wrong was when he felt the caboose jolting on the ties. After the accident he observed a fresh skid mark on the highway, about 50 feet from the crossing, the indications being that the brakes on the roadster had been applied and that one of the wheels had slid a distance of about 15 feet,

Flagman Wolfe stated that he started sounding the air whistle when he saw the automobile truck approaching from the east, at which time the caboose was about 15 or 20 car-lengths from the crossing, he also noticed the roadster approaching from the west. He continued sounding the air whistle and he also heard the proper station and crossing signals sounded on the engine whistle. As the caboose passed over the crossing at a speed of about 15 miles per hour the roadster appeared to be about three car-lengths or more from the track and while he could not estimate its speed he expected it would be able to stop. Afterwards he tried to apply the brakes, but was uncertain as to whether he did so before the caboose turned over. Brakeman Pearson gave testimony similar to that of Conductor Hayman and Flagman Wolfe.

Engineman Forbes stated that he sounded the station signal and the crossing signal when approaching Hopewell and that the automatic ringer was ringing/engine bell. Fireman Jones informed him that there was an automobile truck approaching from the east on the highway and then the truck passed over the crossing ahead of the train. Engineman Forbes saw the roadster approaching from the west when it was about 500 feet from the crossing and watched it pass the truck at about that location, he started sounding the engine whistle and continued watching the roadster, thinking that his train would be passing over the crossing before the roadster reached it and that the roadster would stop and wait until the train got by. The roadster kept on going, however, and he saw it when it ran into the side of the train, whereupon he applied the air brakes in emergency. After the accident he saw the skid mark on the highway near the crossing, previously mentioned by the conductor, this mark appeared at a point 26 paces from the crossing and was about 12 feet in length, the indications being that only a single wheel slid when the brakes were first applied, and then the mark ceased, as though the brakes on the automobile had been released to some extent, however, he could not say positively whether this mark had been made by the roadster.

Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Campbell, who reside near the crossing, were sitting on their porch and saw the truck, the train, and the roadster immediately prior to the accident. They saw two

men on the back of the caboose, heard the whistle blowing as the train approached the crossing and saw the truck pass over just ahead of the train. They then observed the roadster approaching, saying that it appeared to be moving rapidly, and Mrs Campbell remarked to her husband that it did not look as if the roadster were going to stop.

Jewett Pollock, about 18 years of age, driver of the roadster, stated that he had been driving a car for about five or six years, he resides about one-fourth mile east of the crossing. He said he was keeping his eyes on the truck coming from the opposite direction, as well as on the road ahead, and passed the truck just west of the crossing. While rounding the curve and just before reaching the crossing, when his roadster was opposite the freight depot, located on the north side of the highway 32 feet from the main track, he saw the caboose of the train suddenly appear in front of him, at which time he estimated the speed of his car to have been about 35 miles per hour, and at once applied the brakes and was still doing so when the roadster struck the train. The roadster had been purchased second hand, it was in good condition, while the mechanical brakes were fairly good, but the muffler cut-out wire had broken three days prior to the accident and had not been repaired, resulting in considerable noise being made by the exhaust when the engine was running. The boy stated that he did not hear any whistle signal sounded by the train, nor did he see the train until the caboose suddenly appeared in front of him, too late to avert the accident. He also said that he was not holding any conversation with the other boy who was in the machine with him and was killed in the accident, but was devoting his undivided attention to driving. He had lived at his present residence for over one year, was familiar with conditions at the crossing, having used it an average of about once a week, saying that he never stopped before passing over it, only slowing down, and in this instance it did not occur to him to look and see whether the way was clear before attempting to pass over it.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by an automobile being driven into the side of a train at a public highway crossing at grade, for which the driver of the automobile was responsible.

Jewett Pollock, driver of the automobile, resided in the vicinity, was familiar with conditions at the crossing and had used it frequently, furthermore, the weather was clear at the time of the accident, early in the afternoon, and a clear view of the approaching train could have been had at any time within one-half mile of the crossing, while there is a crossing warning sign located 216 feet west of the main track. The proper whistle signals were sounded as the train approached the crossing, but for some reason they were not heard by the driver of the automobile, due possibly to the fact that considerable noise came

from the open exhaust of his car. The driver should have exercised care in approaching the crossing, after having passed the motor truck which was moving in the opposite direction, and should have definitely ascertained that the crossing was clear before attempting to pass over it. Instead of so doing, however, he approached the crossing at an excessive rate of speed and it did not even occur to him to look and see whether the way was clear; the result was that he did not see the train until it started over the crossing in front of him, too late to avert the accident.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.