

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

---

INVESTIGATION NO. 2752

THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

AT SILVER CREEK, NEBR., ON

DECEMBER 16, 1943

---

SUMMARY

---

    Railroad:                  Union Pacific  
    Date:                      December 16, 1943  
    Location:                  Silver Creek, Nebr.  
    Kind of accident:          Collision with motor-truck  
    Equipment involved:       Express train : Motor-truck  
    Train number:              Extra 2830 West:  
    Engine number:             2380                  :  
    Consist:                   9 cars                  :  
    Estimated speed:          65-70 m. p. h. : 4 m. p. h.  
    Operation:                Timetable, train orders and  
                              automatic block-signal system  
    Track:                      Double; tangent; level  
    Highway:                   Tangent; crosses track at  
                              angle of 89°50'; level  
    Weather:                   Cloudy  
    Time:                       About 6:26 a. m.  
    Casualties:               1 killed; 5 injured  
    Cause:                      Motor-truck being driven upon  
                              highway grade crossing imme-  
                              diately in front of approaching  
                              train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

---

INVESTIGATION NO. 2752

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS  
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

---

January 28, 1944.

---

Accident at Silver Creek, Nebr., on December 16, 1943,  
caused by a motor-truck being driven upon highway  
grade crossing immediately in front of an approach-  
ing train.

---

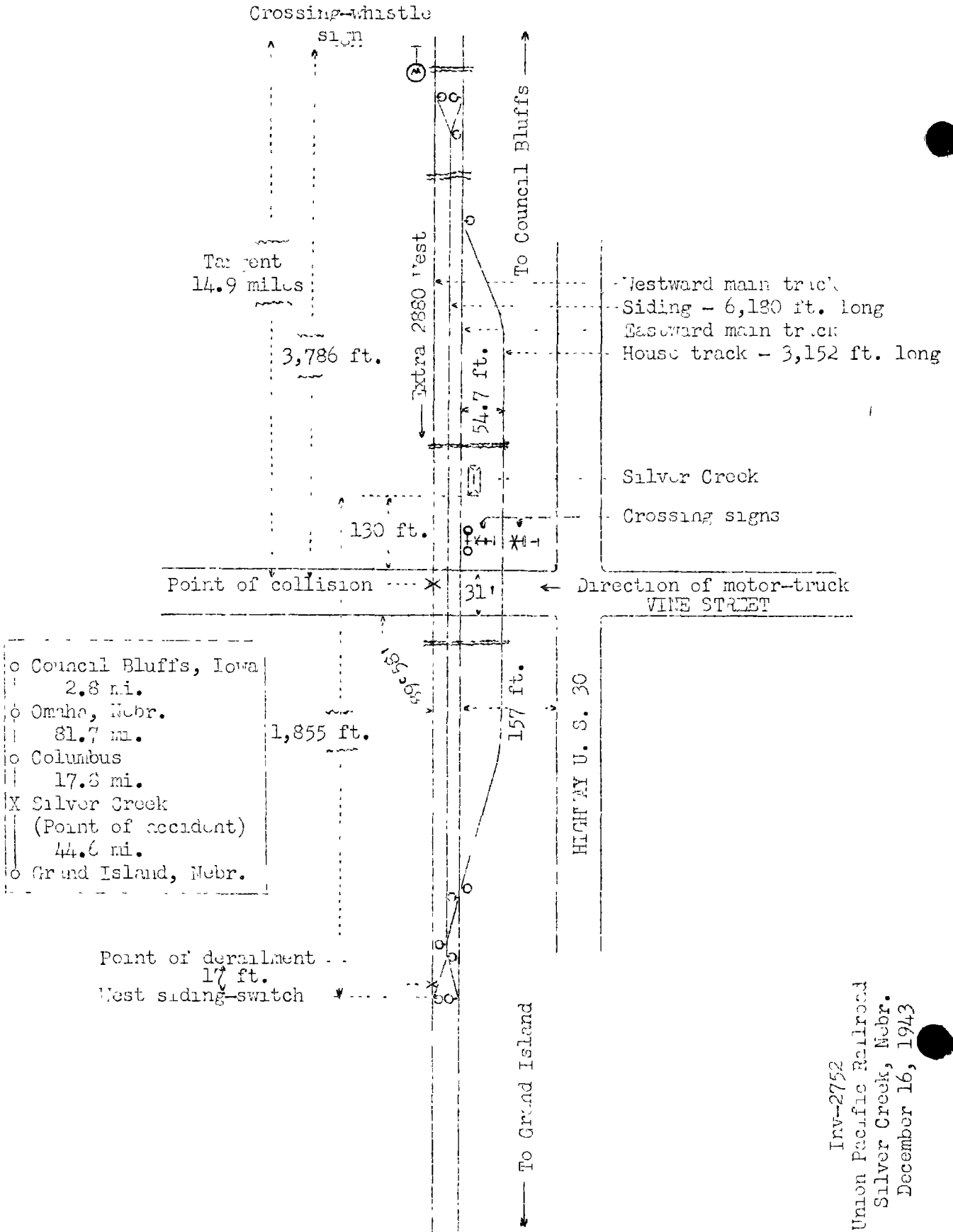
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On December 16, 1943, there was a collision between an express train on the Union Pacific Railroad and a motor-truck at a highway grade crossing at Silver Creek, Nebr. This accident resulted in the death of one train-service employee, and the injury of one express messenger and two train-service employees.

---

<sup>1</sup>Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.



- o Council Bluffs, Iowa  
2.8 mi.
- o Omaha, Nebr.  
81.7 mi.
- o Columbus  
17.3 mi.
- X Silver Creek  
(Point of accident)  
44.6 mi.
- o Grand Island, Nebr.

Inv-2752  
 Union Pacific Railroad  
 Silver Creek, Nebr.  
 December 16, 1943

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Nebraska Division designated as the First subdivision and extending between Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Grand Island, Nebr., 146.9 miles. This was a double-track line over which trains moving with the current of traffic were operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. At Silver Creek a siding 6,100 feet in length was located between the main tracks. A house track paralleled the main tracks and was 54.7 feet south of the eastward main track. The west siding-switch was 1,855 feet east of the station. The collision occurred on the westward main track where the railroad was crossed at grade by Vine Street at a point 120 feet west of the station, and the train was derailed at the west siding-switch. From the east on the railroad the track was tangent 14.9 miles to the point of collision and a considerable distance beyond. The grade for west-bound trains was level 2,500 feet to the point of collision, then 0.153 percent ascending to the point of derailment and about 1,100 feet beyond.

Vine Street crossed the tracks at an angle of 89° 51'. From the south the street was tangent and practically level to the crossing, and a considerable distance beyond. On the crossing the street was 11 feet wide and was surfaced with gravel, which was practically level with the top of the rails.

A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign was located to the right of the direction of north-bound traffic, 17.5 feet south of the house track, 98 feet south of the center-line of the westward main track and 9 feet east of the street. This sign was mounted on a post and bore the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black letters on a white background, and below it there was a rectangular sign which bore the words "4 TRACKS." A wigwag crossing-signal was located to the right of the direction of north-bound traffic, in the southeast angle on the crossing, 59.6 feet south of the center-line of the westward main track and 9 feet east of the street. The wigwag signal was suspended from the top of an octagonal-square frame, which supported at its right a shield bearing the words "LOOK-ALIK." The wigwag was about 9 feet above the ground level, bore the word "STOP," and displayed a red light, the lens of which was 6-3/8 inches in diameter. At the right end of its swing the wigwag was hidden by the shield, and this resulted in a flashing-light effect. A bell was mounted on the frame above the wigwag signal. Below the wigwag there was a standard cross-buck sign, which bore the words "RAILROAD CROSSING," and below it there was a horizontal sign which bore the words "2 TRACKS." All words of the signs on this signal were in black letters on a background of aluminum.

The wigwag signal and the bell were controlled by track circuits. The track circuit in the westward main track extended 4,550 feet east of the crossing. A crossing-whistle sign for west-bound trains was located 3,786 feet east of the crossing.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine Whistle Signals.

Note.--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "—" for longer sounds. \* \* \*

SOUND.	INDICATION.
* * *	
(1)    — — o —	Approaching public crossings at grade, * * *
* * *	

Sec. 39-1136 of the Nebraska Motor Vehicle Laws, 1959, read in part as follows:

\* \* \* Whenever any person driving a vehicle approaches a highway and interurban or steam railway grade crossing and a clearly and visible and positive signal gives warning of the immediate approach of a railway train or car, it shall be unlawful for the driver of the vehicle to fail to bring the vehicle to a complete stop before traversing such grade crossing. \* \* \*

The maximum authorized speed for the train involved was 70 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 2880 West, a west-bound express train, consisted of engine 2880, one box car, one express-refrigerator car, one box car, three express-refrigerator cars, and three baggage-mail cars, in the order named. The second, fourth, fifth and sixth cars were of steel-underframe construction, and the remainder were of all-steel construction. After a terminal air-brake test was made this train departed from Omaha, Nebr., 99.5 miles east of Silver Creek, at 4:13 a. m., departed from Columbus, 17.7 miles east of Silver Creek and the last open office, at 6:01 a. m., and while

moving at an estimated speed of 65 to 70 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck and was derailed.

The motor-truck involved was a tractor and a semi-trailer owned by W. W. Harrington, Inc., Fairmont, Neb. The driver held Nebraska operator's license No. N-5085-14. The tractor was a 1958 Chevrolet, equipped with a 194 6-cylinder motor, and bore Nebraska license 24 <sup>9</sup>/<sub>4</sub> 1050, and I. C. C. license 255-966. It weighed 5,400 pounds, and was equipped with dual tires on the rear wheels, hydraulic brakes and an enclosed steel cab. It was hauling a semi-trailer, which had dual tires on its wheels. It was provided with a vacuum brake. The weight of the trailer when empty was 5,850 pounds, and at the time of the accident it was loaded with 22,913 pounds of salt. It bore Nebraska license 54Y10. The over-all length of the tractor and the semi-trailer was 26 feet. This vehicle moved northward on Vine Street, stopped south of the crossing, then proceeded at an estimated speed of 4 miles per hour, and the trailer was struck by Extra 2060 West.

There was no unusual condition about the enclosed cab that obscured the vision of the driver. Because of the station building and a freight train which was standing on the siding about 500 feet east of Vine Street, the driver's view of a train approaching from the east was restricted to about 675 feet.

The semi-trailer was demolished. The pilot of engine 2830 was demolished, and, when the engine reached the heel of the north switch-point 1,700 feet west of the crossing, a portion of the pilot, about 4 feet 7 inches long, caught in the heel of the switch and derailed the engine and seven cars. The engine and its tender, remaining coupled, stopped on their left sides about 300 feet west of the switch, headed northeast, with the front end of the engine about 40 feet north of the westward main track. The engine was badly damaged. The first, second and third cars stopped about 280 feet west of the switch, parallel and adjacent to each other, across both main tracks and at right angles to them. The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh cars, remaining in line, stopped at an angle of 15 degrees to the tracks, with the front end of the fourth car suspended on the engine. These cars leaned toward the north. The front truck of the eighth car was derailed. The second, fourth and fifth cars were destroyed. The first and third cars were badly damaged.

It was cloudy and dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6:25 a. m.

The engineer was killed, and the fireman and the bag\_agerman were injured.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement of trains over the crossing was 61.7. During the 24-hour period beginning at 1 p. m., December 17, 1945, 445 automobiles and 79 trucks passed over the crossing.

### Discussion

Extra 2880 West was approaching the crossing at a speed of 65 to 70 miles per hour in territory where the maximum authorized speed was 70 miles per hour. The headlight was lighted brightly, the bell was ringing, and both enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead. The engine whistle was sounded for a street crossing about 500 feet east of the station. The last blast was prolonged over this crossing and was still being sounded at the time of the collision. When the engine was a short distance east of the station the fireman observed a motor-truck stop clear of the westward main track, then, when the engine was about 150 feet east of the crossing, the motor-truck proceeded northward over the crossing. He immediately warned the engineer. Both enginemen jumped to the deck at the rear of the boiler-head, and the engine collided with the trailer. At that instant the brakes became applied in emergency, but the fireman was not certain whether the engineer moved the brake valve to emergency position; however, after the accident the brake valve was in emergency position and the throttle was closed. The pilot of the engine was demolished, and a portion was caught at the heel-block of the north switch-point of a trailing-point switch 1,708 feet beyond, then the derailment occurred. It is not known whether the engineer saw the motor-truck, as he was killed in the accident. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly en route.

The driver of the motor-truck was an experienced driver. At the time of the accident, he had been on duty about 2 hours 30 minutes, after having been off duty 18 hours. He was not familiar with the crossing. He stopped the motor-truck in compliance with the warning signals of the wigwag signal located about 40 feet south of the westward main track. He observed the headlight of a west-bound freight train, which was standing on the siding about 500 feet east of Vine Street. He thought this train was actuating the wigwag signal and, since the train was not moving, he drove



the truck upon the crossing at a speed of about 4 miles per hour. When the tractor was north of the westward main track the driver saw the approaching train, but he could not haul the semi-trailer off the crossing in time to avert the accident. He did not hear the engine whistle being sounded; however, the windows of the cab of the tractor were closed and the tractor was making considerable noise, as it was being operated in low gear.

The driver complied with the law by stopping short of the eastward main track in compliance with the warning given by the wigwag signal, but he assumed that a train standing on the siding was actuating the signal. When the truck stopped south of the wigwag signal his view of a train approaching on the westward main track was restricted to about 675 feet, because of the station building and the train on the siding. The wigwag signal bore a sign indicating the presence of three tracks. If the driver had made certain before he drove upon the crossing that no train was approaching on any track, this accident could have been prevented.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a motor-truck being driven upon a highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-eighth day of January, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Petterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTELL,  
Secretary.