

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2883
WABASH RAILROAD COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT CLARKSDALE, ILL., ON
APRIL 8, 1945

SUMMARY

Railroad: Wabash
Date: April 8, 1945
Location: Clarksdale, Ill.
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Passenger
Train number: 4
Engine number: 670
Consist: 6 cars
Speed: 66 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable, train orders and
automatic block-signal system
Track: Double; tangent; level
Weather: Clear
Time: 11:15 a. m.
Casualties: 2 killed; 23 injured
Cause: Train entering open switch at
high rate of speed

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2883

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

WABASH RAILROAD COMPANY

May 12, 1945.

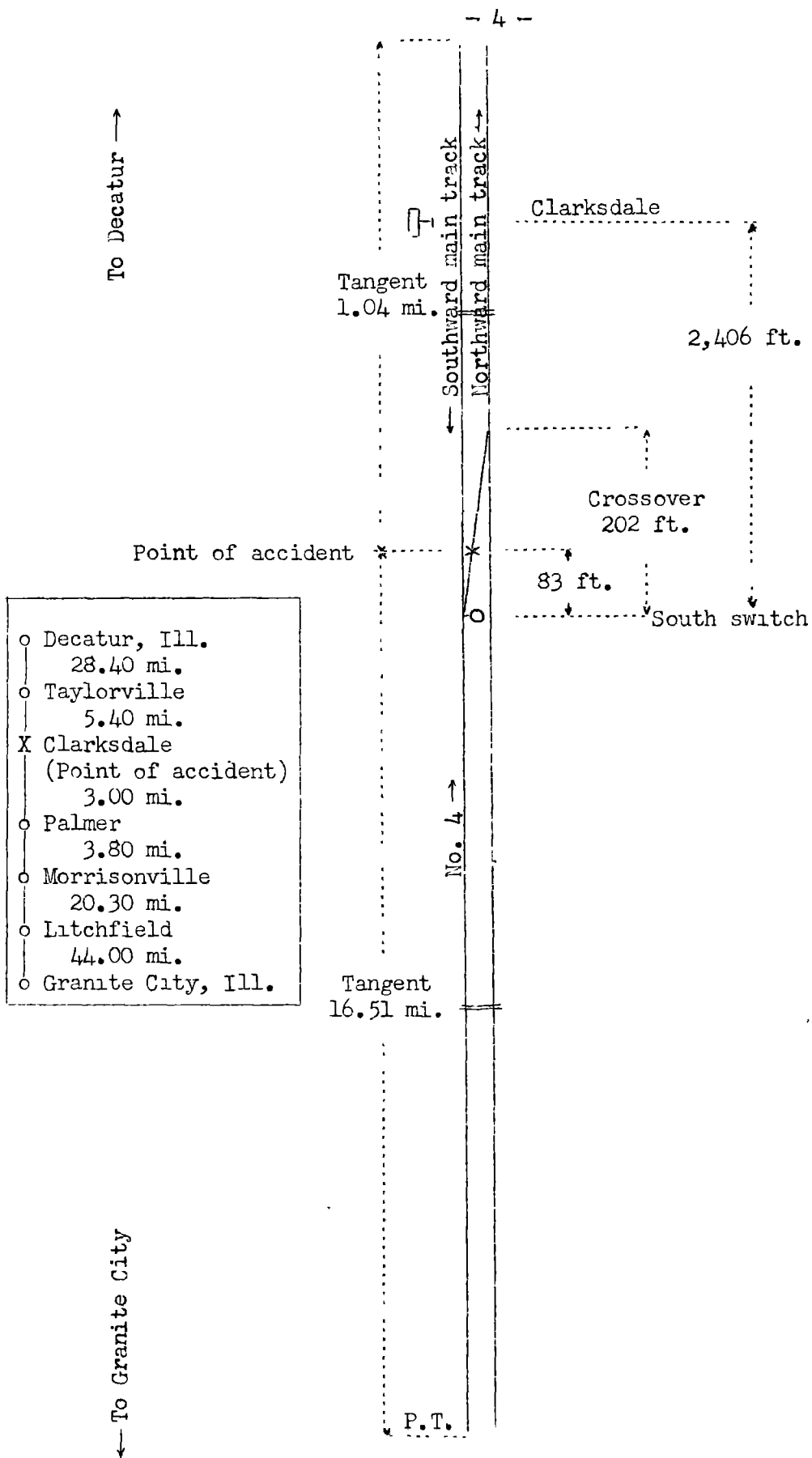
Accident at Clarksdale, Ill., on April 8, 1945, caused
by a train entering an open switch at a high rate
of speed.

¹
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On April 8, 1945, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Wabash Railroad at Clarksdale, Ill., which resulted in the death of 2 train-service employees, and the injury of 20 passengers and 3 dining-car employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

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



Inv. No. 2883
Wabash Railroad Company
Clarksdale, Ill.
April 8, 1945

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Decatur Division designated as the 13th District and extending northward from Granite City to Decatur, Ill., 104.9 miles, a double-track line over which trains moving with the current of traffic are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. At the time of the accident the northward main track between Morrisonville and Taylorville, respectively, 64.3 and 76.5 miles north of Granite City, was out of service, and trains moving in either direction between these stations were being operated on the southward main track. Movements against the current of traffic are made only in case of emergency and are operated by timetable, train orders and a manual-block system. At Clarksdale, 6.8 miles north of Morrisonville, a trailing-point crossover 202 feet long connects the northward and the southward main tracks. The south switch of this crossover was 2,406 feet south of the station. The accident occurred on this crossover at a point 83 feet north of the south switch. The main tracks are tangent throughout a distance of 16.51 miles south of this point and 1.04 miles northward. The grade is level.

The switch stand for the south switch of the crossover is between the main tracks. It is of the hand-throw low-stand type and is provided with an oil lamp. The centers of the lenses are 22 inches above the tops of the ties. When the switch is lined normally a green light is displayed. When the switch is lined for movement from the southward main track through the crossover to the northward main track a red light is displayed.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

10. Color Signals.

Color.	Indication.
(a) Red.	Stop.
* * *	
(c) Green.	Proceed, and for other uses prescribed by the Rules.
* * *	

FORMS OF
TRAIN ORDERS.

* * *

D-S.

Providing For The Use Of a Section Of Double
Track As Single Track.

_____ track will be used as single
track between F and G.

* * *

All trains must use the track specified between the stations named and will be governed by rules for single track.

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 80 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 4, a north-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 670, a 4-6-2 type, two baggage cars, three coaches and one buffet-lounge car, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. At Litchfield, 27.1 miles south of Clarksdale, the crew received copies of train order No. 49 reading as follows:

All trains use southward track as single track between south crossover Taylorville and crossover Morrisonville.

No. 4 departed from Litchfield at 10:46 a. m., 2 minutes late, departed from Morrisonville, the last open office, on the southward main track, at 11:09 a. m., 4 minutes late, and while moving at a speed of 66 miles per hour it entered the crossover at Clarksdale at the south switch and was derailed.

The engine stopped on its left side between the main tracks and practically parallel to them, with the front end 531 feet north of the point of derailment. The tender was torn loose from the engine and stopped on its right side about 10 feet east of the northward main track and 500 feet north of the point of derailment. The first car stopped on its right side east of the tender. The second to the fifth cars, inclusive, stopped practically upright and in various positions east of the northward main track. The fifth car stopped upright and in line with the crossover. The engine and the first 3 cars were badly damaged, and the rear 3 cars were slightly damaged.

During the 30-day period prior to this accident no movement against the current of traffic was made in this territory.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:15 a. m.

The engineer and the fireman were killed.

Discussion

No. 4, a north-bound first-class passenger train, was moving on the southward main track at a speed of 66 miles per hour, according to the tape of the speed recorder, in territory where the maximum authorized speed was 80 miles per hour, when it entered the crossover at Clarksdale at the south switch and was derailed. As the train was approaching Clarksdale the conductor was in the rear car and the flagman was in the third car. The first these employees knew of anything being wrong was when the brakes became applied in emergency just before the derailment occurred. Examination immediately after the accident disclosed that the south switch of the crossover was lined for entry to the crossover. It could not be determined when the enginemen first became aware that the switch was improperly lined, as they were killed in the accident.

The investigation disclosed that the northward main track was out of service between Morrisonville and Taylorville on account of the derailment of a car of Extra 2503 North, a north-bound freight train, in the vicinity of Palmer, 3 miles south of Clarksdale. The front portion of Extra 2503 was moved on the northward main track to Taylorville, then the engine returned to Palmer on the southward main track. While this engine was en route southward to Palmer it stopped in the vicinity of the crossover at Clarksdale about 10 a. m., and the front brakeman was left at this point. He was instructed by the conductor to hold all south-bound trains north of the crossover until engine 2503 returned to Clarksdale from Palmer on the southward main track with the rear portion of their train. However, when engine 2503 arrived at Palmer, it was found that it would be necessary to repair a damaged switch on the northward main track before the intended movement of the rear portion of Extra 2503 could be made. The train dispatcher issued train order No. 49, which established the southward main track as single track, and No. 4 received this order at Litchfield. The rear portion of Extra 2503, the engine, the enginemen, the conductor and the flagman were at Palmer, and the front brakeman was in the vicinity of the crossover at Clarksdale when No. 4 passed Palmer about 11:12 a. m.

The front brakeman said he did not operate either switch of the crossover, and no other person was observed in the vicinity prior to the accident. However, a section foreman and

two laborers, who were on a motor-car which was operated on the southward main track immediately behind engine 2503 when this engine moved southward from Taylorville to Palmer, said they saw the front brakeman line the south crossover switch for entry to the crossover immediately after their motor-car passed the switch. The north crossover-switch was damaged as a result of the accident to such an extent that its position at the time of the accident could not be determined.

In this territory movements against the current of traffic are permitted to be made at maximum authorized speed. The automatic block-signal system in use does not provide protection for such movements and the means provided to authorize and govern such movements do not afford equivalent protection. If the passenger train involved in this accident had been required to approach facing-point switches under control when operating against the current of traffic this accident might have been prevented.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a train entering an open switch at a high rate of speed.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twelfth day of May, 1945.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.