

Inv-2287

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

WABASH RAILWAY

HUNTINGTON, IND.

AUGUST 13, 1938

INVESTIGATION NO. 2287

SUMMARY

Inv-2287

Railroad: Wabash
Date: August 13, 1938
Location: Huntington, Ind.
Kind of accident: Derailment after striking automobile
Equipment involved: Passenger train : automobile
Train number: 1
Engine number: 672
Consist: 6 cars
Speed: 45-65 m.p.h. : standing
Operation: Timetable, train orders and automatic
blocksignal system
Track: One main and four auxiliary tracks;
tangent, practically level.
Highway: Tangent; crosses tracks at angle
of 70° 43'
Weather: Clear
Time: 2:42 p.m.
Casualties: 2 killed and 2 injured
Cause: Automobile proceeding upon railroad
crossing at grade in front of
approaching passenger train.

September 28, 1938.

To the Commission:

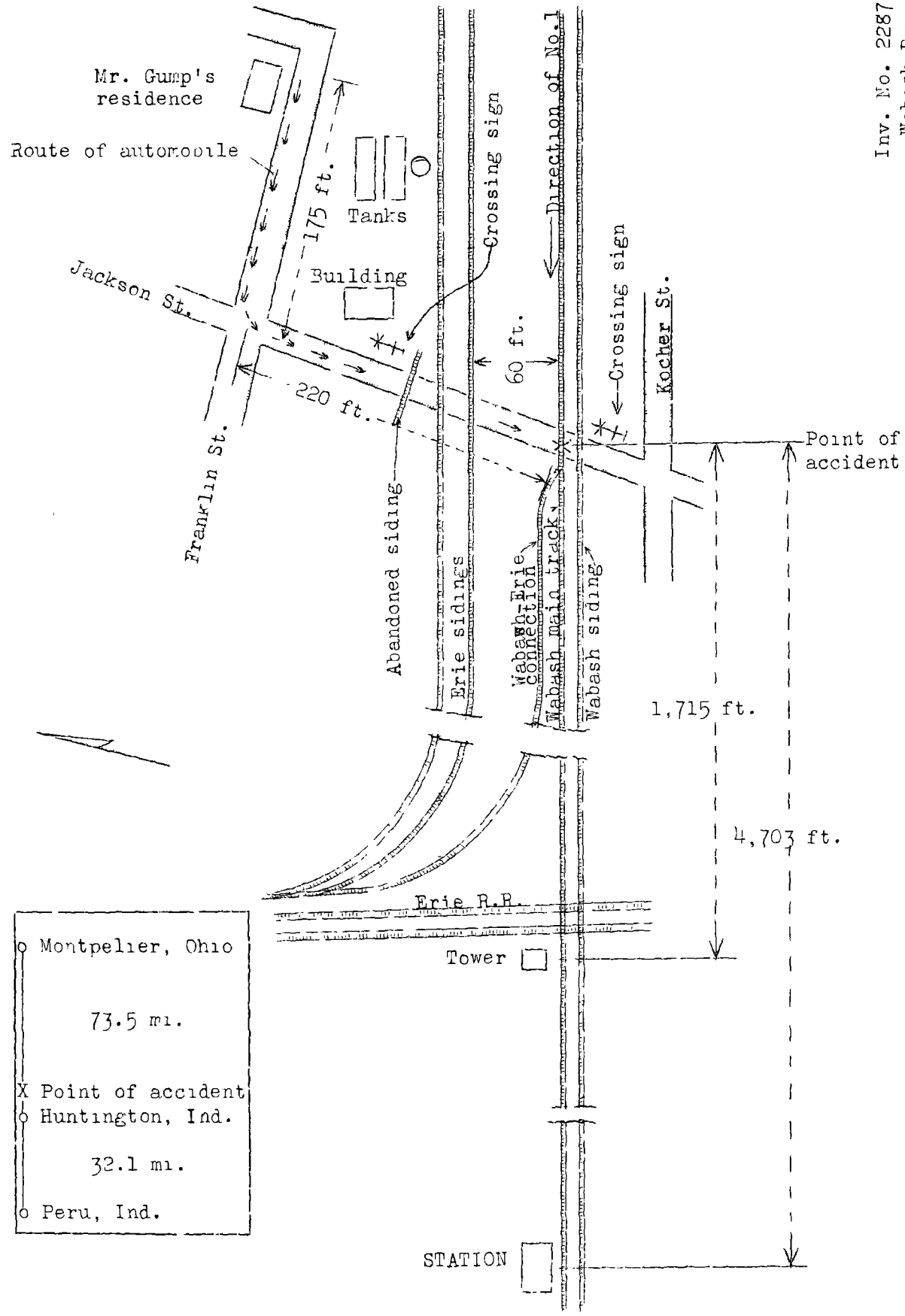
On August 13, 1938, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Wabash Railway as a result of striking an automobile at a street crossing at Huntington, Ind., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of one passenger and one dining-car employee. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Public Service Commission of Indiana.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the First District, Montpelier Division, which extends between Montpelier, Ohio, and Peru, Ind., a distance of 105.6 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at Jackson Street crossing, located 4,703 feet east of the passenger station. Approaching from the east the track is tangent for more than 2 miles to the point of accident and for several miles beyond. The grade for west-bound trains is 0.092 percent descending at the point of accident.

Jackson Street extends north and south and crosses five tracks at an angle of $70^{\circ} 43'$. Approaching from the north there is an abandoned track, a short distance beyond which are two auxiliary tracks of the Erie Railroad 13 feet apart; 60 feet south of the second of these is the main track of the Wabash Railway and 13 feet farther south a siding. The accident occurred on the main track. The street is constructed of stone screenings and is 16 feet in width except at the crossing where it is 12 feet wide; the tracks of the Wabash Railway are planked with 8-inch by 12-foot planks on each side of the rails, the filling between being of stone screening, the same material as used in the street. Franklin Street crosses Jackson Street at right angles at a point 220 feet north of the main track, and from this point southward to the crossing the street is tangent and is level to a point 130 feet from the main track where it ascends to the level of the tracks, the total rise being 2.14 feet; it is slightly undulating, however, between the tracks of the two railroads. This crossing is protected by two standard cross-bar signs bearing the words "RAILROAD CROSSING", and below each cross-bar is a horizontal bar bearing the word "DANGER". One sign is located north of the abandoned track and east of the street, 101 feet north of the center line of the main track; the other sign is located south of the siding and east of the street.

Inv. No. 2287
 Wabash Ry.
 Huntington, Ind.
 August 13, 1938



o Montpelier, Ohio
 73.5 mi.
 X Point of accident
 o Huntington, Ind.
 32.1 mi.
 o Peru, Ind.

STATION

The view of an approaching west-bound train had by the driver of a south-bound vehicle is obstructed by a building and some storage tanks until reaching a point 120 feet from the main track where it is unobstructed for a distance of 760 feet; when 80 feet from the main track a clear view can be had for a distance of three-fourths mile and when 35 feet from the track the view is unobstructed. A row of telegraph poles is located 37 feet north of the main track.

A track known as Wabash-Erie interchange, which parallels the main track on the north, leads off the main track through a facing-point switch for westward movements at a point 37 feet west of the center of Jackson Street crossing.

Rule 14(1) of the operating rules provides that enginemen shall sound two long, one short and one long blast of the engine whistle approaching public crossings at grade; a footnote provides that not less than nine seconds should intervene between the starting of the first blast and the closing of the final blast, the final blast of the whistle to be continued until the engine reaches the crossing.

Whistle posts for west-bound trains are located 6,560 feet and 3,620 feet, respectively, east of Jackson Street crossing.

The State of Indiana has no law and the City of Huntington has no ordinance requiring drivers of automobiles to take any definite action upon approaching crossings of railroad tracks at grade.

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

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2:42 p.m.

Description

No. 1, a west-bound passenger train, consisted of one express car, one mail car, one combination baggage-passenger car, two chair cars, and one cafe-lounge car, all of all-steel construction, in the order named, hauled by engine 672, of the 4-6-2 type, and was in charge of Conductor Meyers and Engineman Morris. This train departed from Fort Wayne, Ind., 23.9 miles east of Huntington, at 2:15 p.m., according to the train sheet, on time, passed Roaroke, the last open office, 8.7 miles east of Huntington, at 2:34 p.m., on time, and on approaching Huntington struck an automobile at Jackson Street while traveling at a speed

estimated to have been between 45 and 65 miles per hour, and was derailed at a point 103 feet beyond.

The automobile involved was a 1929 model 6, Hupmobile sedan, owned and operated by Steve Fuller of Huntington, Ind. This automobile proceeded westward on Franklin Street, turned southward on Jackson Street and proceeded upon the crossing at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles per hour, stopped with its front wheels between the rails of the main track, and was struck by No. 1.

The automobile was demolished and the wreckage scattered throughout a distance of 502 feet west of the crossing along the main track and the Wabash-Erie track. Engine 672 and its tender stopped on their left sides, in reverse position, on the Wabash-Erie track, 500 feet west of the crossing, and were badly damaged. All of the cars in the train were derailed and badly damaged, with the exception of the rear car which was partly derailed and only slightly damaged. The first car stopped opposite the trolley diagonally across the main track and the siding to the south; the second car was across all three tracks, leaning toward the north; the third and fourth cars stopped in a northwesterly direction across the Wabash-Erie track, leaning toward the north; the fifth car also was derailed to the north, but remained in an upright position; this car stopped approximately 175 feet west of the crossing. The employees killed were the engineman and the fireman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Meyers stated that at Fort Wayne an air-brake test was made and a running test on leaving that point, and the brakes functioned properly. On approaching Huntington his train was traveling at a speed of about 60 miles per hour when he felt an emergency application of the air brakes; he then felt a second surge and the train stopped. He was unable to state their location when the brake application was made, but thought the train was only a short distance from the crossing. The whistle signal had been sounded for the various crossings in that vicinity, but he was not positive that it was sounded at Jackson Street; neither did he know whether the engine bell was ringing.

Head Brakeman Turley stated that the speed was about 45 or 50 miles per hour when he felt an emergency application of the air brakes after which he thought the train traveled a distance of about 300 feet before the accident occurred.

Flagman Weakly stated that he was in the rear end of the rear car. He heard crossing whistle signals being sounded, then a succession of short blasts, and he knew that something was wrong. He estimated the speed of his train to have been 60 or

65 miles per hour when he felt a heavy application of the air brakes.

William Ross, a trespasser who was in the front doorway of the first car of No. 1, stated that on entering Huntington he felt an application of the air brakes, reducing the speed possibly one-third. He heard the whistle signal being sounded and on hearing many short blasts he looked to the right and saw the hood of an automobile on the track about 200 feet ahead of the train. He felt the air brakes being applied in emergency and braced himself, after which the train struck the automobile. He also stated that between the blasts of the whistle he thought he heard the engine bell ringing.

Steve Fuller, the driver of the automobile involved, stated that when he left the home of a relative, George Gump, located on Franklin Street about 175 feet from Jackson Street, he proceeded westward on Franklin Street and after turning southward on Jackson Street attained a speed of between 20 and 25 miles per hour. He then reduced speed but proceeded upon the crossing in high gear at a speed of 15 or 20 miles per hour, although he did not look at his speedometer. He first looked westward and then eastward when on the track and saw the approaching train about one-half block distant and heard the whistle signal, this being the first time he had heard it. In one statement he said he was 15 feet from the main track when he first saw the train and in other statements he said he was on the track when he saw the train. He tried to stop and the front wheel dropped into a hole; he then placed the gears in reverse, tried to back, but the motor died and he jumped out just before the car was struck. George Gump was following him in his truck but at no time did the truck push the automobile. Fuller stated that he had been operating automobiles since 1929, but had never owned a car until in March of this year when he purchased the car involved in this accident. He held a chauffeur's license for the year 1938 and had never before been in an accident. The speedometer and brakes were in good condition, the brakes having been relined about 2 months previously and there had not been any trouble with the battery. On Thursday, two days prior to the accident, the radiator developed a leak which flooded the motor. He repaired the radiator by filling the hole with soap and used the car during the day on Friday, Friday night and Saturday morning and had not experienced any trouble with it during this period. He was familiar with the crossing which was not in good condition, having several holes in it. He had observed No. 1 pass about the same time every day, but did not know the time when approaching the crossing on the day of the accident. He was very indefinite as to the view to be had of the track eastward, but after visiting the scene of the accident he stated that when 75 feet from the main track he could see a

distance of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ blocks; when 58 feet from the track he could see a distance of more than three-fourths mile, and when 35 feet from the track he could see at least a mile. He said that if he had first looked to the east instead of to the west he would have stopped before fouling the main track.

George Gump, of Huntington, stated that as he turned the corner in his truck, from Franklin Street into Jackson Street, he saw Steve Fuller ahead slowing down for the crossing. He came up to within 12 feet of the automobile, operating his truck in high gear and intending to shift gears and he then saw the approaching train and heard a shrill whistle apparently at the same time that Fuller saw the train. He immediately stepped on his brakes and killed his engine and his truck stopped about 15 or 16 feet to the rear of the automobile which was on the main track. Fuller just had time to jump out of the car when it was struck behind the front wheels by the train. The automobile was moving at the time it was struck and he thought that if it had not been for a hole in the crossing the car would have cleared the track. Gump stated that this crossing was one of the worst crossings in that vicinity over the Wabash tracks, that a hole from 4 to 6 inches deep was in the center of the track and this condition had existed for some time, no work having been performed at this crossing during the current year. He uses this crossing daily. Gump further stated that he was not pushing Fuller's automobile at the time of the accident. A leak had developed in the radiator of the automobile on August 11 and on that day he had pushed the car a distance of about ten blocks, but he had not shoved the car since that time, and Fuller was operating the car under its own power on the day of the accident.

Mr. and Mrs. Worthington, whose home is located in the northwest corner of Franklin and Jackson Streets, stated that they were in the southeast room of their home when they heard a truck pushing an automobile and looking out they saw the vehicles turn the corner and stop. The drivers, Fuller and Gump, got out and stood talking a few minutes, but they did not make any repairs or adjustments to the automobile. The vehicles then started toward the crossing and it appeared that the truck was still pushing the automobile as the truck was immediately behind the automobile. The Worthingtons had seen this automobile being driven eastward on Franklin Street under its own power about one-half hour previously. The windows in their room were closed but they heard the whistle signal being sounded almost continuously as the train approached and there were short blasts just before the accident.

George, Sam and Jack Tester witnessed the accident from the porch of their home located one block west of Jackson Street and south of the tracks. They had a clear view of the track

toward the east, saw the train approaching and heard the whistle being sounded almost continuously. George Tester saw the automobile when it was about 30 feet from the crossing, proceeding at a low rate of speed, with a truck immediately behind it, and Sam Tester thought it was a trailer at the rear of the automobile. The automobile then appeared to drive away from the truck and upon the main track where it was struck by the train. George Tester stated that the crossing was in fair condition and Jack Tester stated it was rough but was unable to say whether or not there were any holes in it.

Towerman Witt, of the Wabash-Erie interlocking tower located about 1,715 feet west of Jackson Street, stated that he was looking out the east window of the tower when he heard No. 1 approaching. He saw an automobile, and what appeared to be a trailer at its rear, proceeding at a low rate of speed over the tracks of the Erie at Jackson Street crossing. At this time there was an excessive amount of whistling by the train, but the automobile continued to move southward and when the front wheels were on the north rail of the main track it appeared to back slightly, then lunge forward and settle in the center of the track.

Section Foreman Murray, in charge of the section on which this accident occurred, stated that he was working about one-quarter mile west of Jackson Street when the accident occurred. After the accident he inspected the switch leading to the Wabash-Erie connection track and found it in good condition and not damaged in any way. This switch is equipped with a safety locking device to hold the points closed, which was in good condition and functioning properly. The switch stand had been struck by an object, apparently the automobile, and debris was caught in the frog. Marks on the track indicated that the train was derailed at a point between the crossing and the frog of the switch. As a result of the collision some of the filling had been scraped out between the planks on the western half of the crossing, and the sidewalk, located west of the crossing, constructed of the same material, was damaged in the same way. In the course of patrolling his section on the morning of the accident he crossed Jackson Street twice, and this crossing was in good condition. He last worked on this crossing on July 25 when a few slight depressions were filled in on the main track and siding, and between the tracks. The planks were 8 inches wide and 5 inches thick and the top surface of the highway came to within one-half inch of the top of the planks, and the surface of the crossing as a whole was uniform; there were no depressions and the crossing was safe for a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour. He had not received any complaints relative to this crossing.

Track Supervisor Watkins stated that he had last observed the condition of the crossings in Huntington on August 11 when he passed over them on his motor car. He found all crossings in good condition. After the accident he observed the conditions at Jackson Street to be as stated by Section Foreman Murray. The staff on the switch stand was bent, apparently due to the automobile striking it.

Division Engineer Bennett noted the condition of the crossing after the accident, stating that the approach to it was in good condition, that the surface was uniformly good, being less than one-half inch below the top of the planks, that a portion between the rails west of the center line of the street had been gouged out as a result of the collision, and that the sidewalk between the rails was missing. The first mark of derailment was on a tie 9 inches from the gauge side of the south rail and 103 feet from the center line of Jackson Street.

Observations of Commission's Inspectors

Inspection of the crossing revealed that the crushed stone filling between the inside planks of the main track was uneven and depressed somewhat below the top level of the planks. There was some evidence that this filling had been disturbed at the west end of the crossing and the crushed stone sidewalk between the rails just west of the crossing had been gouged out. The planks were in their proper location and securely anchored to the ties.

The first marks of derailment appeared on a tie 9 inches from the gauge side of the south rail, with a corresponding mark on a tieplate outside of the north rail at a point 17 feet east of the point of the frog of the Wabash-Erie switch; these marks were 103 feet west of the center line of the crossing and together with other marks, apparently made by derailed equipment, extended westward intermittently for a distance of 197 feet, from which point the track was torn up or badly damaged to the point where the engine stopped.

It is a distance of approximately 400 feet from the Gump residence to the main track at Jackson Street crossing and it is necessary to make a right-angle turn after proceeding only 175 feet; the streets are unimproved, though passable. In tests made by the Commission's inspectors the time consumed driving an automobile over this route varied from 21 to 24 seconds. Jackson Street crossing is used principally by the residents in that vicinity. A traffic check at this crossing for a 24-hour period disclosed that 126 vehicles and 11 trains passed over it. The maximum hourly traffic was 14 vehicles between 7 and 8 p.m., and the heaviest train movement was between 2 and 3 a.m. when 3 trains

passed. During the time this traffic check was in progress it was noted that while two west-bound passenger trains approached this crossing the whistle was sounded in accordance with rule 14(1) for periods of 1 minute 22 seconds and 1 minute 20 seconds, respectively, the excessive length of time being due to the fact that there are other street crossings at grade east of Jackson Street, thereby making the whistling almost continuous from the time the first blast was sounded for the most easterly crossing until Jackson Street was reached. It was also noted that all other trains from both directions approaching Huntington sounded the crossing whistle signals in accordance with the requirements of the rules.

Discussion

Jackson Street crossing is used principally by residents in the vicinity, the traffic is light and the crossing over the Wabash main track is in fair condition. The driver of the automobile was familiar with the crossing and the schedule of this passenger train. According to the evidence he first saw the train and heard the whistle when it was about one-half block away; by that time he was on the track. He stopped with the front wheels between the rails and shifted to reverse gear, but the motor died; he jumped out before the collision. Apparently some part of the wreckage of the automobile became lodged in and near the frog of the Wabash-Erie switch, causing the derailment of the train.

A truck was immediately behind the automobile and there was considerable evidence to the effect that the truck was pushing the automobile as it approached the crossing, although both drivers stated that the automobile was not being pushed but was being propelled under its own power. The automobile was old and in poor operative condition, it having been necessary to push it only two days previously, and only temporary repairs had been made since that time. Two residents of Huntington stated that the truck was shoving the automobile and as they turned the corner at Jackson Street, the vehicles stopped and the drivers got out and conversed, and then proceeded in their respective vehicles toward the crossing, and it appeared that the truck was still pushing the automobile. Two eye-witnesses of the occurrence of the accident, located about 650 feet west of the crossing, stated that they saw the automobile proceed upon the crossing at a low rate of speed, one stating that it appeared to have a trailer at its rear, while the other stated that the automobile appeared to drive away from the truck upon the track. The towerman, located in a tower about 1,700 feet west of the crossing, also stated that the automobile appeared to have a trailer at its rear. The truck stopped 15 feet from the main

track and according to the truck driver's statement he saw the approaching train at the same time that the other driver saw it, at which time the former stopped the truck. While it cannot be definitely stated that the automobile was being pushed by the truck just prior to the accident, the evidence strongly indicates that this was the case. Pushing an automobile over a railroad crossing at grade is a hazardous undertaking and should not be attempted unless it is known that the way is clear and it is safe to proceed. This accident also serves to call attention to the necessity for strict supervision over motor traffic to the end that vehicles which are not safe and suitable for service should not be permitted to use the public highways; such vehicles constitute a menace not only to travelers on highways but also, as in this instance, to employees and travelers on railroads.

Neither of the men in the automobile and truck heard the whistle signals until he saw the train, yet the evidence indicates that whistle signals were being sounded almost continuously for more than 1 mile as it approached the crossing and the signals were clearly heard by various witnesses in the vicinity. Regardless of whether the automobile was being operated under its own power or was being pushed by the truck, had necessary precautions been taken to see whether the main track was clear before reaching it, this accident would have been averted. The approaching train could have been seen by either driver in ample time to stop clear of the main track. Apparently the driver of the automobile was more concerned with the progress of his vehicle than with precautions which should be taken in crossing a railroad crossing at grade.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by an automobile proceeding upon a railroad crossing at grade directly in front of an approaching passenger train.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.