

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE WABASH RAILWAY AT JACKSONVILLE, ILL.,
ON DECEMBER 28, 1932

March 11, 1933.

To the Commission:

On December 28, 1932, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Wabash Railway at Jacksonville, Ill., which resulted in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 3 passengers, 4 employees, and 1 Pullman porter. The investigation of this accident was held in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

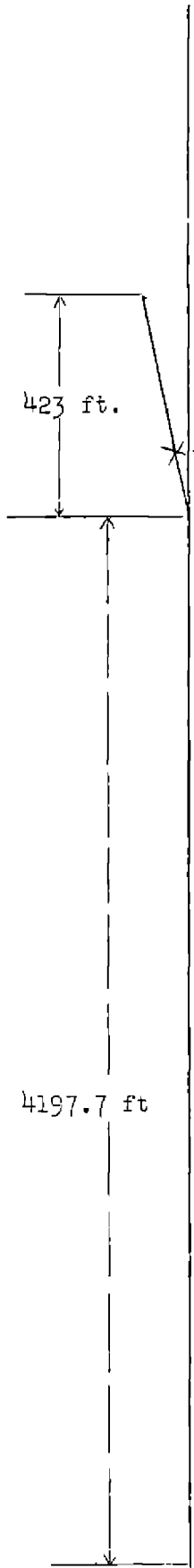
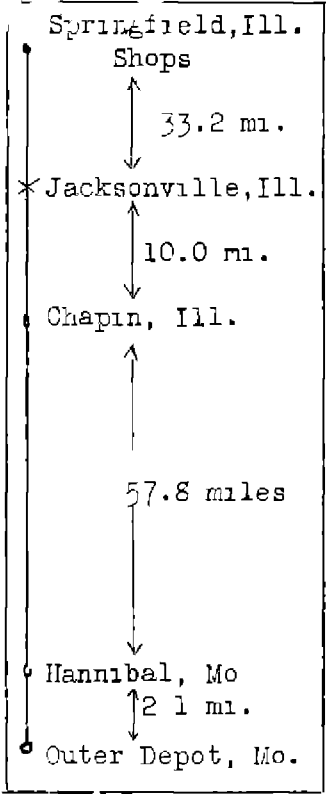
This accident occurred on that part of the 10th District of the Decatur Division extending between Outer Depot, near Hannibal, Mo., and Shops, near Springfield, Ill., a distance of 103.1 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The actual point of derailment was on a spur track, approaching the spur-track switch from the west the track is tangent for a distance of 4,197.7 feet, while the grade at the point of accident is 0.193 per cent ascending for eastbound trains.

The switch involved leads off the main track to the north or left and it is a facing-point switch for eastbound trains, the spur track is 423 feet in length. The switch stand is of the Elliott type and is located on the north side of the track. A single red target, 15 inches square, is displayed when the switch is open, a switch lamp mounted 7 feet above the need block displays a green indication when the switch is closed and a red indication when the switch is open. The maximum speed limit for passenger trains is 50 miles per hour.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7.28 p.m.

Description

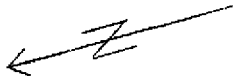
Eastbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of 1 combination mail and baggage car, 1 dining car, 1 chair car and 1 Pullman car, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 632, and was in charge of Conductor Redman and Engineman Rapp. The train passed Chapin, 10 miles from Jacksonville, at 7.19 p.m., six minutes late, entered the spur track switch at Jacksonville and was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 45 and 50 miles per hour.



Direction of train →

Point of accident

Inv No. 1802
Wabash Railway
Jacksonville, Ill.
December 28, 1932.



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A tank car loaded with oil was standing on the spur track and was struck by the train and shoved ahead to the end of the track where it stopped on its left side. The engine, tender and the first three cars in the train were also derailed, the engine being overturned on its right side south of and at right angles to the spur track, the tender was also overturned but remained coupled to the engine, while the derailed cars remained upright and practically parallel with the spur track. The contents of the tank car ignited, causing damage to the first two cars of the train as well as to buildings adjacent to the track. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman, and the employees injured were the brakeman, an express messenger, a cook and a waiter.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Redman stated that the customary air-brake test had been made and that there was nothing unusual about the operation of the train en route. As the train was approaching Jacksonville he heard the whistle sounded for a highway crossing located about 300 feet west of the spur-track switch, and upon reaching a point about one-half block from the spur track, while the train was traveling at a speed of approximately 45 or 50 miles per hour, the brakes were applied in emergency. Shortly afterwards he felt the train swerve as it entered the spur track, followed almost immediately by severe jolts during the course of the derailment and collision. After caring for the passengers he examined the spur-track switch and found it lined for the spur track, with the switch points fitting properly and the lever in the open-position socket, the lamp was in its proper position, but was not burning, and the switch lock hasp had been sawed off, he did not examine the lock. From the location of the train at the time the emergency brake application was made it was his opinion that the engine crew discovered the open switch and made an effort to stop the train before it entered the spur track.

Flagman Fleming stated that the train was approaching Jacksonville at a speed of approximately 45 miles per hour when the brakes were suddenly applied in emergency, followed by the crash about two seconds later, he thought the engine had reached the spur-track switch when the brakes were applied. Obtaining flagging equipment, he started back to protect and when he reached the switch he observed that the light was extinguished although the lamp was on the staff; the switch was set for the spur track and the lever was in the proper notch for the switch set in that position, but the hasp had been sawed off, thus releasing the switch lock.

Section Foreman Gregory stated that he arrived at the scene of accident soon after its occurrence, examined the switch stand, and found it in the condition as described by Conductor Redman and Flagman Fleming. The switch lock which was suspended by a

chain attached to the stand, was in locked position and showed signs of saw marks. He found the fountain of the lamp about half full of oil and he lighted the lamp without having to adjust the wick. This was an 8-day lamp, he usually cleaned and filled it about every five days, it was last cleaned and filled on December 24, while the last time he saw it burning was the day before the accident. Upon examining the track he found sand on and alongside the rails beginning at a point approximately 200 feet west of the switch and extending over the switch and onto the spur track, there being no sand on the main track east of the switch. He found nothing about the track or switch points that could have caused the accident.

The statements of Track Supervisor Pyle and Division Engineer Hayes substantiated those of the train crew and the section foreman as to the damaged condition of the switch stand. Supervisor Pyle also said that on account of Section Foreman Gregory having been ill on the day of the accident, he instructed the foreman of an adjoining section to patrol the track and that foreman reported that he passed the switch about 9.15 a.m., noticing no unusual condition at that time.

Road Foreman of Engines Lock stated that the usual speed for first-class trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 50 miles per hour and that to make the station stop the brakes on eastbound trains are not ordinarily applied until after passing the spur track. There are only two switch lights in that locality and an engineman can easily determine the absence of one of these lights as soon as his train rounds the curve west of that point. He estimated that in clear weather and with the headlight burning, but the switch light not burning, the engineman could have seen the switch stand for a distance of between 600 and 800 feet.

Trainmaster Pace stated that the last eastbound train which passed the point of accident prior to its occurrence was at 4.49 p.m., and the last westbound train at 5.48 p.m. He also said that the sand on the rails began at a point 330 feet west of the switch. The captain of the Jacksonville police department, who accompanied him, found the hasp of the switch stand where it had fallen after having been sawed off.

About three hours prior to the occurrence of the accident an iron bar and a nut were found on the rails about 1,200 feet west of the switch involved in this accident. A 16-year old boy, who previously had been placed in an institution on account of having set fire to buildings at various times, confessed to having placed the iron bar and nut on or against the rails, and subsequently he confessed that he also started to saw a rail, and that between 6.30 and 7 p.m., he returned to the tracks and sawed off the staple on the switch stand, thus freeing the lock, and then operated the switch lever several times. Forgetting how the lever went back into its proper position, he left the

switch open, he also turned down the wick and as a result the light was extinguished. The hack saw blade and frame used by the boy were found at the points where he said he had thrown them. He disclaimed any intent to wreck a train.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by an open switch, due to malicious tampering.

Subsequent to the accident the switch points were found to be lined for the spur track, the switch light was extinguished, and the hasp was missing from the switch stand. An inspection of the damaged stand showed that the hasp had been sawed off with a hack saw, thus releasing the switch lock and permitting the switch to be opened. A 16-year old boy admitted having tampered with the switch, as well as having placed obstructions on the rails earlier in the afternoon.

According to the statements of the train crew, the brakes were applied in emergency before the train reached the switch and an examination of the track after the accident disclosed the presence of sand on the rails 330 feet west of the switch, indicating that the engine crew had been on the alert and discovered the open switch, but not soon enough to stop the train in time to avert the accident.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.