

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ATLANTA & WEST POINT RAILROAD AT EAST POINT, GA.,
ON OCTOBER 23, 1929.

January 31, 1930.

To the Commission:

On October 23, 1929, there was a collision between a Central of Georgia passenger train and an Atlanta & West Point work train on the line of the latter railroad at East Point, Ga., resulting in the injury of one employee and four passengers.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Atlanta & West Point Railroad extending between Newman and East Point, Ga., a distance of 32.53 miles; in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. Trains of the Central of Georgia Railway are operated over this portion of this railroad under trackage agreement. The collision occurred at a point about 2,000 feet west of the depot at East Point, on a siding; this siding parallels the main tracks on the south, the point of accident being 344 feet east of the west switch of a crossover that connects the eastbound main track with the siding; this switch is a facing-point switch for eastbound trains, with a No. 10 turnout. Approaching the switch from either direction the track is tangent for a considerable distance, while the grade for eastbound trains is level to a point about 60 feet east of the switch, and it is then ascending, being 0.57 per cent at the point of collision.

The switchstand is of the low ground-throw type, equipped with small, oval, two-way targets, and is located on the engineman's side of an eastbound engine; when the switch is open a red indication is displayed, and when it is closed it displays a green indication. Signal A-74, a permissive signal, normally displaying a caution indication, is of the one-arm, upper-quadrant, semaphore type, and is located 1,740 feet west of the switch, it governs the approach to the beginning of the manual block system in effect between East Point and Atlanta, a distance of 9.95 miles.

Legend

Train No 18. — — — — —

Extra 231. - - - - -

2,222 feet
Point of accident
to
station

Point of accident

204 ft

Taylor

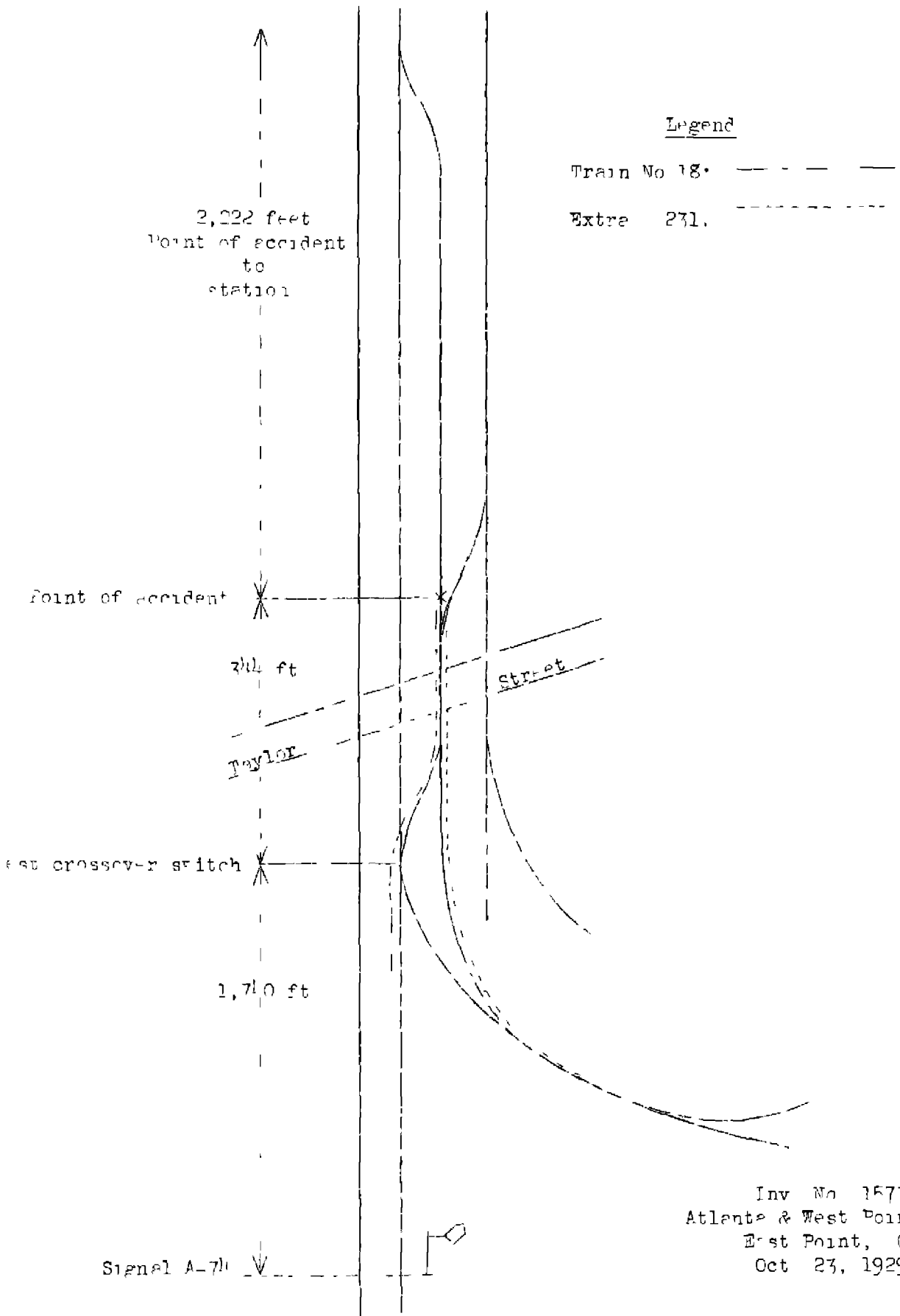
Street

East crossover switch

1,710 ft

Signal A-70

Inv No 1573
Atlantic & West Point R R
East Point, Ga
Oct 23, 1929



The view approaching the switch is unobstructed, however, on account of dust from a nearby crossing having accumulated on the switch targets, it was difficult to distinguish the color of the indication displayed, when at a distance of more than 200 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 9.49 a. m.

Description

A&WP work extra 231, a local switch run serving industries, in charge of Conductor Walker and Engineman Moseman, was performing switching, and at the time of the accident engine 231, headed west, was shoving four box cars eastward on the siding at a speed of about 6 miles per hour when it was struck by C of Ga. train No. 18.

Eastbound C of Ga. passenger train No. 18 consisted of one baggage car and two coaches, in the order named, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 424, and was in charge of Conductor Ware and Engineman Stephenson. This train passed College Park, the last open office, 1.83 miles west of East Point, at 9:47 a. m., two minutes late, passed signal A-74, which apparently was displaying a caution indication, entered the crossover switch, which had been opened practically in front of the approaching train, and collided with work extra 231 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles per hour.

Both engines had their front ends badly damaged, but none of the equipment in either train was derailed. The employee injured was the engineman of C of Ga. train No. 18, who jumped just prior to the collision.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Walker, of work extra 231, stated that the work of switching the industry tracks located south of the siding had been performed and that on reaching a point on an industrial track, located at the west end of the siding, where he had a clear view of the main tracks, he looked toward the west, at about 9.48 a. m., and saw train No. 18 approaching, a short distance west of signal A-74. Conductor Walker and Brakeman Butler were riding on the leading car as the four empty cars were being backed eastward toward the siding; head Brakeman White was riding on the car next to the engine. Conductor Walker gave signals to Head Brakeman White, it being intended to kick the four cars in on this track, and the conductor expected the head brakeman to cut off the cars at the engine. The conductor gave the engineman a "kick" signal, and then went to the head brake, located on the forward end of the leading car,

and started to apply it. The first he knew of anything wrong was when Brakeman Butler shouted a warning of danger, and on looking back, the conductor saw train No. 18 entering the open main line switch. Conductor Walker had no idea that the head brakeman was going to open the main line switch, saying that it was not his intention to use it until six or eight minutes afterwards.

Head Brakeman White, of work extra 231, stated that he was riding on top of the car next to the engine and that while rounding the wye track he looked at his watch and thought it read 10:46, when as a matter of fact it read 9:46, consequently he presumed that train No. 18 had gone. When the conductor gave him the signals, he understood what movements were intended; the head brakeman at first gave the engineman signals to slow down and then a stop signal, in order to permit Brakeman Butler to line the switch leading to the siding. The work train was brought to a stop and the head brakeman climbed down the side of the car next to the engine, on the main track side, and almost directly opposite the main track switch. As he knew that his engine would be heading out of the siding and on to the eastbound main track within a few minutes, he decided that he would unlock and open the main track switch in order to have it lined when his engine did head out. After opening this switch, Head Brakeman White started eastward in order to cut off the four cars and on reaching a point about one and one-half or two car-lengths from the switch, but not yet in position to make the cut, he saw Brakeman Butler come around the end of the leading car. The first the head brakeman knew of anything wrong was on receiving a signal, made in haste and given by Brakeman Butler, to close the main track switch, at which time the work train had just started to back eastward again. On turning and looking toward the west, Head Brakeman White saw train No. 18 approaching, it then being about one or two car-lengths west of the switch; the head brakeman ran as fast as he could toward the switch in an endeavor to close it, but to no avail. He estimated the speed of train No. 18 to have been about 35 miles per hour when he first saw it, but said that the speed had been reduced considerably at the time of the accident. Head Brakeman White said he felt sure that train No. 18 had passed and that he never saw it at the time he opened the switch, not having looked to see if any train was approaching.

Engineman Moseman, of work extra 231, stated that at the time his engine was backing around the wye track, he saw train No. 18 approaching, west of signal A-74, which at that time was displaying its normal indication. Just prior to the accident, however, his attention was centered on the contemplated back-up movement on the siding and he

was looking back watching for signals from the conductor, and he did not see Head Brakeman White get off and open the main track switch. Statements of other members of the crew of extra 231 developed nothing additional of importance.

Engineman Stephenson, of train No. 18, stated that signal A-74 was displaying its normal indication, caution, at the time his engine passed it, at a speed of about 18 or 20 miles per hour. He noticed the work train switching on the siding and saw a kick signal given to the engineman of that train. Just as his own engine got almost to the switch, he noticed some one waving toward the switch, and it was then that he saw that the switch points were open. He applied the air brakes in emergency, reversed the engine, opened the sanders and jumped from the fireman's side just prior to the collision. Engineman Stephenson said that he did not see any one at the switch just before or after he passed signal A-74, saying that he was not paying any attention to the position of the switch, but was watching the man who was going to make the cut between the work engine and cars, and being afraid that that man would not clear his own train, he sounded a warning signal on the air whistle, with which engines in this territory are equipped, on account of a city ordinance against the use of steam whistles except in certain cases. Statements of Fireman Murphy corroborated in substance those of Engineman Stephenson.

Conductor Ware, Flagman Oattis and Baggage-master Mabry, of train No. 18, estimated the speed of their train to have been about 30 miles per hour at the time signal A-74 was passed and also when the air brakes were applied in emergency, at about 12 or 15 miles per hour when the collision occurred. They were unaware of anything wrong until the emergency application was made. Tests made of signal A-74 subsequent to the accident disclosed it to be in proper working order.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by a switch being opened directly in front of an approaching train, for which Head Brakeman White, of work extra 231, is responsible.

Head Brakeman White misread his watch and thought that it was 10:43 a. m., when as a matter of fact it was only 9:46 a. m., consequently, he presumed that train No. 18 had gone and opened the main track switch, of his own accord, in order to have it open when his engine was ready to head out of the siding, knowing that it would be ready to head out within a few minutes. At the time he opened the switch, he did not look to see if any train

As approaching, and after opening it he immediately started eastward in order to make the cut between the engine and the four cars that were to be kicked in on the siding. When he became aware of the approach of train No. 18, which appeared to have passed signal A-74 before the switch was opened, he ran back toward the switch in an endeavor to close it, but could not reach it in time. Head Breckenan White had no business opening this main track switch until his crew was ready to use it, and had he followed this procedure, the accident would not have occurred.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.