

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
CENTRAL RAILROAD OF NEW JERSEY NEAR CHATSWORTH, N. J.,
ON JULY 27, 1921.

September 17, 1921.

On July 27, 1921, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Central Railroad of New Jersey, near Chatsworth, N. J., which resulted in the injury of 11 passengers and 7 employees. The investigation of this accident was conducted in connection with a representative of the New Jersey Board of Public Utility Commissioners, and as a result of this investigation the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the New Jersey Southern Division extending between Red Bank and Bayside, N. J., a distance of 104.2 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a block-signal system following passenger movements only.

The point of accident was near the west passing-track switch at Chatsworth, about 860 feet west of the train-order signal. Approaching the point of accident from the east the track is tangent for about 3 miles; the grade varies, being 0.3 per cent descending for about 1,000 feet to the point of accident. Approaching from the west there are about 800 feet of tangent, a 2-degree curve leading to the left 530 feet in length, and about 600 feet of tangent to the point of accident. The weather was clear at the time of the accident,

which occurred at about 5.34 p.m.

Description.

Eastbound passenger train No. 324 consisted of 2 baggage cars, 1 combination baggage and passenger car, 1 coach, and 1 baggage car, in the order named, hauled by engine 573, and was in charge of Conductor Creby and Engineman Chamberlain. The first car was of steel construction, while the others were of wooden construction. Upon the arrival of this train at Atsion, 11.4 miles from Chatsworth and the last telegraph station, the crew received two train orders, Form 31, reading as follows:

No. 53: "Eng. 182 will run extra Lakenurst to Winslow Jct. and meet No. 324 at Harris."

No. 55: "No. 324 will meet Extra 182 west at Chatsworth instead of Harris."

Train No. 324 left Atsion at 5.04 p.m., on time, and as it was rounding the curve west of Chatsworth, at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 30 miles an hour, Engineman Chamberlain observed extra 182 approaching from the east at a high rate of speed; he brought his train to a stop, but before he could release the brakes and start the train backwards, it was struck by extra 182.

Westbound freight train extra 182 consisted of 10 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 182, and was in charge of Conductor Bogart and Engineman Wilson. At Lakenurst the crew received a copy of train order No. 53, previously quoted, written on Form 19. Extra 182 left Lakehurst at 4.46 P.M., left Whiting, the last telegraph station, 12.5 miles

from Chatsworth, at 5.08 p.m., passed the train-order signal at Chatsworth, which was displaying a stop indication for the purpose of having the crew receive a copy of train order No. 55, and collided with train No. 324 while running at a speed estimated to have been about 45 miles per hour.

The passenger train was driven backwards a distance of about 65 feet, the engine coming to rest in an upright position with all wheels derailed. The tender broke away from the engine and the first car, and came to rest on the south side of the track, with the cistern torn from the frame. None of the cars in train No. 324 was derailed. Engine 182 came to rest on its left side on the south side of the track, and was quite badly damaged. The first car in the train of extra 182 was demolished, while the next two cars were derailed and damaged.

Summary of evidence.

Engineman Chamberlain, of train No. 324, saw the west-bound train order board at Chatsworth displaying a stop indication and when he saw extra 182 he thought it was moving so fast that it would not be able to stop; on this account he applied the air brakes and brought his own train to a stop. The agent on duty at Chatsworth said he copied train order No. 55 and placed the train order board in the stop position for extra 182 at 4.59 p.m. When he saw the extra approaching he thought it would not be able to stop, and said he gave a stop signal with his hand from the fireman's side of the approaching train, but that no attention was paid to it.

Engineman Wilson, of extra 182, said he had not expected to receive a train order at Chatsworth relative to train No. 324, inasmuch as it was the last telegraph office before reaching Harris, the meeting point fixed by train order No. 53. When approaching Chatsworth, Head Brakeman Lundell said the train order board was in the clear position. Engineman Wilson said the position of the board was difficult to see and that he did not see its indication until after the accident. His first intimation of danger was when he saw smoke, followed by the appearance of the engine of train No 324 coming around the curve; he said he then gave his attention to bringing his train to a stop, and did not notice the indication of the train order signal as his train passed it. Brakeman Lundell said he had difficulty in seeing the position of the train order board, but told the engineman it was in the clear position, he then noticed the engine of train No. 324 approaching around the curve and on looking at the train order board when passing it, saw that it was in the stop position.

Brakeman Lundell could give no definite reason for not being able to see the train order board or for misreading its indication, but thought the background made it difficult to see the signal, while the statement of Engineman Wilson also indicated that the signal was difficult to see. The statements of other employees were to the contrary, their estimates as to its visibility running as high as 1 mile, depending upon weather conditions. By actual observa-

tion it was found that on account of the varying grade approaching Chatsworth from the east, there are certain points from which it is difficult to see the position of the signal, but under unfavorable conditions caused by the clouds of an approaching thunder-storm, it was found that the signal was plainly visible a distance of about 2,000 feet.

Fireman Veckman, of extra 182, was making his first trip over this division, he did not know the location of the signal and said that at no time did he see its indication. Conductor Bogart felt an emergency application of the air brakes and on going to the caboose platform saw the train order board displaying a stop indication; he estimated the speed at the time to have been about 50 miles an hour. The statements of Flagman Skillman and Brakeman Breslin, both of whom were also in the caboose, corroborated those of Conductor Bogart.

Dispatcher Spencer, on duty at the time of the accident, said that when extra 182 was delayed to such an extent as to make it necessary to change its meeting point with train No. 324, he tried to reach the operator at Whittings for the purpose of issuing train order No. 55 to the crew of extra 182 at that point. On account of being unable to get in communication with the operator, however, he found it necessary to issue the order to extra 182 at the meeting point.

Conclusion.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engine-

man Wilson, of extra 183, to observe and be governed by the stop indication of the train order board.

According to his own statement, Engineman Wilson was operating his train at a speed of 40 or 45 miles an hour, perhaps more, when approaching the train order board, and while moving at this rate of speed, endeavoring to see its indication, noticed the approach of train No. 324. Engineman Wilson should have had his train under such control as to enable him to bring it to a stop before passing the train order board in the event that he found that board to be in the stop position, and had he controlled the speed of his train in this manner, this accident undoubtedly would not have occurred.

While Brakeman Lundell misread the indication of the train order board, there is nothing to indicate that his action in so doing is responsible for Engineman Wilson's failure to have his train under proper control, inasmuch as it was just after he told the engineman the board was clear that the engineman saw train No. 324 approaching; he is open to censure, however, for calling the indication of a signal before being absolutely sure that he properly observed it.

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.