

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
CHESAPEAKE & OHIO RAILWAY AT HARVEY, W. VA., ON
JULY 11, 1929.

November 6, 1929.

To the Commission:

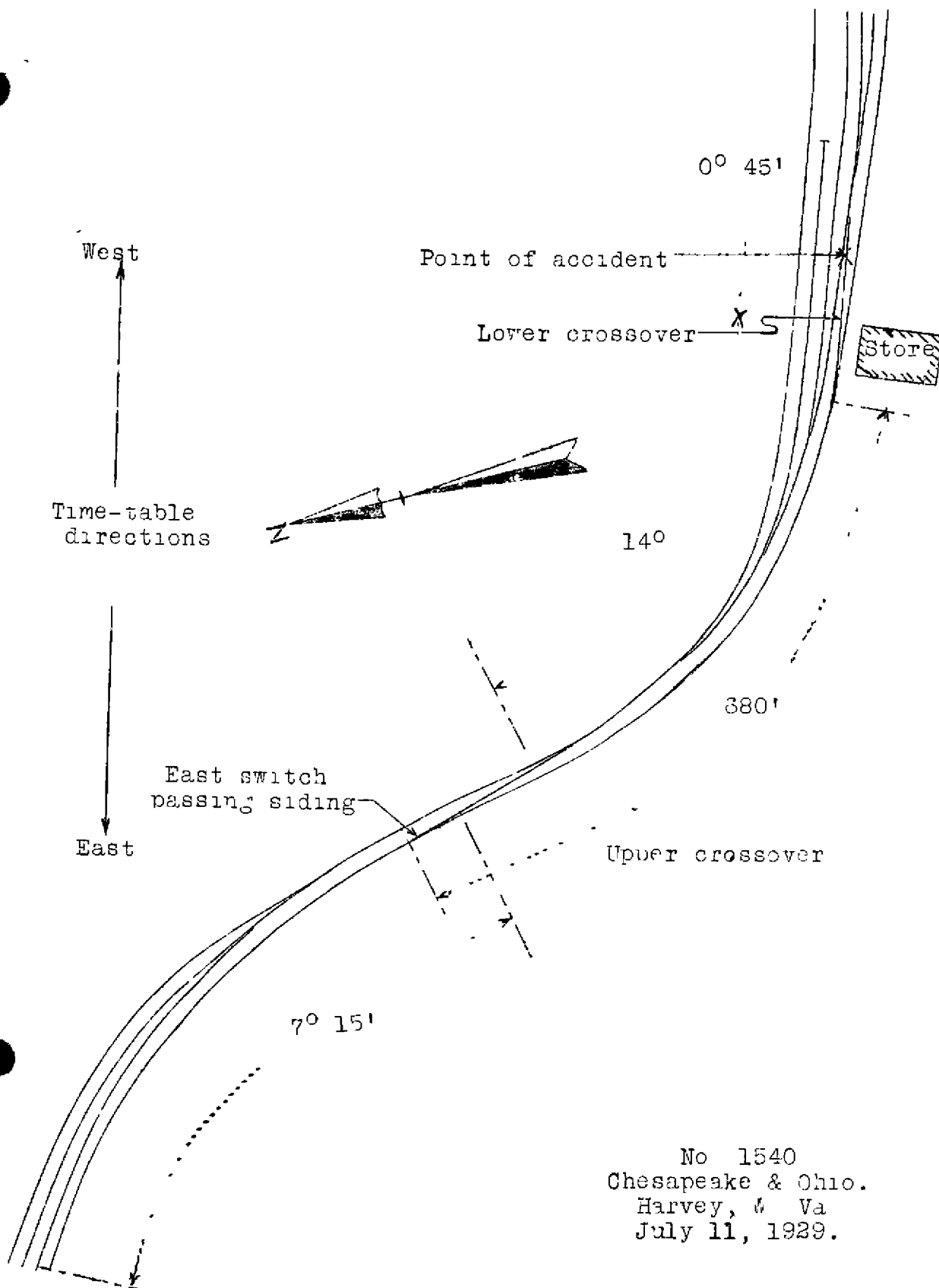
On July 11, 1929, there was a side collision between two freight trains on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway at Harvey, W. Va., resulting in the injury of three employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Loup Creek Subdivision of the Hinton Division, extending between Price Hill and Thurmond, W. Va., a distance of 12.5 miles, this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders. The accident occurred on what is known as the lower crossover at Harvey, at the fouling point of this crossover with the passing siding, approaching the crossover from the east there is a series of short curves and tangents, followed by a compound curve to the left 1,885 feet in length, the maximum curvature of which is 14°, and the accident occurred on this curve at a point about 635 feet from its eastern end, where the curvature is 3°. The grade is 1.30 per cent descending for westbound trains at the point of accident.

The passing siding is about 3,000 feet in length and parallels the main track on the south, the lower crossover is about 200 feet in length and the east switch thereof is located about 675 feet west of the east switch of the passing siding. There is another crossover, known as the upper crossover, which connects the main track and passing siding at the east switch of the passing siding, the siding continuing east of the upper crossover. The east switch of the lower crossover, the switch involved in this accident, is a facing-point switch for westbound trains and leads off the main track to the left. The switch-stand is located on the north side of the main track, on the outside of the curve, and is equipped with a switch lamp mounted above the targets, the centers of the lenses are 8 feet 2 inches above the top of the rail. Night indications are red when the switch is open, and green when it is closed. The switch lamp was not burning, however, at the time of the accident.

Owing to a mountainside on the inside of the curve, with outcroppings of rock, the view is materially restricted.



No 1540
Chesapeake & Ohio.
Harvey, W Va
July 11, 1929.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 10.55 p.m.

Description

Westbound freight train extra 1035-836 consisted, on its arrival at Harvey, of 26 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 1035 and 836, and was in charge of Conductor Holliday and Enginemen Hatcher and Clark. It was brought to a stop on the main track east of the east switch of the passing siding, in the vicinity of the upper crossover, and the engines were then cut off and proceeded westward on the main track to the lower crossover, headed through it, and then backed eastward on the passing siding and performed switching, without closing the main line switch of this crossover. The engines then backed some cars eastward through the upper crossover and against the train standing on the main track, after which the entire train was pulled ahead, westward, through the upper crossover and brought to a stop on the passing siding with the rear end of the caboose just east of the frog of the west switch of the lower crossover. After standing at this point about 12 minutes the rear end of the train was struck by extra 1347.

Westbound freight train extra 1347 consisted of 31 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1347, and was in charge of Conductor Ashley and Engineman Arthur. This train left White Oak Junction, 2 miles east of Harvey, at 10.45 p.m., according to the train sheet, and on reaching Harvey encountered the open main-track switch of the lower crossover and struck the side of extra 1035-836 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 6 and 9 miles per hour.

The caboose and two rear cars of extra 1035-836 were derailed and either partly or completely overturned. Engine 1347, together with its tender, was derailed, but remained upright, the left side of the engine was badly damaged. No other equipment in either train was derailed or damaged. The employees injured were the engineman and fireman of extra 1347, and the middle brakeman of extra 1035-836.

Summary of evidence

Head Brakeman Anderson, of extra 1035-836, stated that on arrival at Harvey, he cut off the engines and lined the lower crossover switches, the engines proceeding through that crossover to the passing siding. After the switching had been completed and the train started to pull in at the upper crossover, Head Brakeman Anderson got on about five or

six car-lengths back of the engines and on reaching a point about opposite the open lower crossover switch, he dropped off, went over, and closed and locked that switch. He said that he did not pull on the chain to test the lock, as the lock snapped, but claimed that he did observe by means of his lighted lantern that the switch points fitted properly. After walking back to the telephone booth, located 95 feet east of the switch and on the north side of the tracks, and standing there with Conductor Holliday until the train had come to a stop on the passing siding, Head Brakeman Anderson proceeded to the head end of the train, walking between the passing siding and the main track, and on his arrival there Engineman Hatcher inquired of him as to whether the lower crossover main-line switch had been closed. After telling the engineman that it was closed, the head brakeman asked the engineman why he had inquired about it and the engineman replied that he had not seen a light on the stand. Head Brakeman Anderson examined the switch after the accident and at that time the switch was open and the switch lock was hanging in the hasp, unlocked. Head Brakeman Anderson further stated that he had found the switch lamp out on a number of prior occasions, although he had never made a report of this condition, and that had he complied with the rules on this particular occasion, and lighted the switch lamp, the accident probably would not have occurred.

Conductor Holliday, of extra 1035-836, stated that he saw Head Brakeman Anderson throw the lower crossover switch, it having remained open about 30 minutes from the time it was last used, and that as was customary, in order to make sure, he asked the head brakeman, when the latter came to the telephone booth, whether the switch had been closed, and the head brakeman told him that it was. After being advised that all switches were closed, the conductor telephoned the dispatcher and reported extra 1035-836 in the clear, and then sat down at the desk in the telephone booth and began doing some work, the accident occurring shortly afterwards. Conductor Holliday further stated that the switch lamp was not lighted and that he had never known of it to be lighted, he only made report of extinguished switch lights when he knew it was the regular practice for such lamps to be kept lighted. Conductor Holliday could not account for the switch being open, although he thought it possible that some one either threw the switch and then Head Brakeman Anderson threw it back to the wrong position, or else that the head brakeman threw the switch twice. Conductor Holliday said that there was ample time at his disposal to have examined the switch prior to the accident and that he would have done so had there been any doubt at all in his mind that it was open, in his opinion the accident could not have occurred had the switch lamp been burning properly.

Engineman Hatcher, of engine 1035, the lead engine, stated that after his engine had passed by the switch about two car-lengths, at the time the entire train was heading in at the upper crossover in order to let extra 1347 pass then, he looked back to see if the switch had been closed, but the switch lamp was not lighted and he could not see the switch points. Therefore, at the time Head Brakeman Anderson came up to the engines after the train had been brought to a stop on the passing siding, he inquired of the head brakeman whether the switch had been closed and was informed that it had been.

Engineman Clark, of engine 836, the helper engine, stated that his attention was occupied in the movements being made and that he did not notice the switch at any time. Flagman Johnson said that the upper crossover main-track switch lamp was not burning either, while the statements of the other members of the crew of this train brought out no additional facts of importance.

Engineman Arthur, of extra 1347, stated that he permitted Fireman Webb, a promoted man, to operate the engine from White Oak Junction, and that he informed the fireman extra 1035-836 was at Harvey. Engineman Arthur estimated the speed of his train to have been about 8 miles per hour approaching Harvey and said that the headlight was burning properly, he was riding on the fireman's side of the cab, on the inside of the curve, and saw the yellow markers on the caboose of extra 1035-836. Engineman Arthur said that he was watching for the switch points and when about one car-length away he observed that the switch lamp was not burning and that the switch was open, he called a warning of danger to the fireman, who immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, reversed the engine and opened the sanders, but too late to avert the collision. On account of his injuries, Fireman Webb was not interrogated at length, however, statements made by him were similar to those of Engineman Arthur. Statements of other members of this crew developed nothing further, except that later on it was found that the switch lock had disappeared, one witness who had examined it prior to its disappearance thought it had been tampered with.

Section Foreman Furry did not remember when he last made a detailed inspection of the switch lamp involved. He had instructed the track walker to fill, clean and oil the switch lamps at Harvey every week, all of them being eight-day lamps, and to blow out the lights every morning on the six switch lamps west of the store, which is located north of the tracks and between the switches of the lower crossover, and to relight them every evening. Section Fore-

man Furry said that he made no examination of the switch lamp following the accident to determine whether there was any oil in the cup, but said that the lamps at Harvey were due to receive the regular oiling and cleaning on the morning following the accident. There was no lock on the switch when he reached the scene, about two hours after the occurrence of the accident.

Track Walker Stevens stated that the switch lamp was burning on the day prior to the accident; he passed the switch on the day the accident occurred, but did not notice whether the lamp was burning. The lamp was out on the morning following the accident, although there was oil in the cup, enough to last the rest of the day. The lamp was a new one and the wick was down in the oil, the lenses were smoked slightly, but not enough to keep the light from being seen had the switch lamp been burning.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by an open switch.

Rules 27-A and 104-A of the book of rules for the government of the operating department of this railroad, read in part as follows:

"27 (a). Conductors and enginemen using a switch where the switch light is imperfectly displayed or absent, must, if practicable, correct or replace the light.

Imperfectly displayed signals must be reported to the Superintendent."

"104 (a). Switches must be left in proper position after having been used. Conductors are responsible for the position of the switches used by them and their trainmen ***."

Examination of the switch immediately after the occurrence of the accident indicated that it had been left open; the switch lock was hanging in the hasp, unlocked, and the switch lamp was not burning. Head Brakeman Anderson emphatically maintained that he closed and locked the switch, although he did not pull on the chain to test the lock, while Conductor Holliday said that he saw the head brakeman throw the switch; in this connection, however, the conductor thought it possible that some one either threw the switch and then the head brakeman threw it back to the wrong position.

or that the head brakeman threw the switch twice. Neither of them paid any attention to the extinguished switch lamp. Several members of the crew were close to the switch after it was handled by the head brakeman, and it would have been practically impossible for any one to have tampered with the switch without having been noticed, neither is it believed that the disappearance of the switch lock after the accident had any bearing other than as an attempt to create the impression that the open switch was due to malicious tampering.

The rules previously quoted were sufficient for the purpose, and their observance upon the part of Head Brakeman Anderson and Conductor Holliday would have prevented this accident.

It further appeared that it was customary to ignore unlighted switch lamps in the vicinity of Harvey, and on this particular occasion both the upper and the lower crossover main track switch lamps were extinguished. It is more than probable that had the lower crossover switch lamp been burning properly, some one would have noticed the open switch in time to have averted the accident. Immediate steps should be taken by the officials to see to it that main line switch lamps are given proper attention, both by those charged with their maintenance and by those who handle them in connection with switching and other train movements.

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

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.