

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE CHICAGO & ALTON RAILROAD NEAR INDEPENDENCE,  
MO., ON FEBRUARY 15, 1928.

March 26, 1928.

To the Commission:

On February 15, 1928, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Chicago & Alton Railroad near Independence, Mo., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of seven passengers and two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Sub-division 1 of the Western Division, extending between Slater and Kansas City, Mo., a distance of 95.2 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 an automatic block-signal system, while under a special bulletin issued in February train movements are also governed by an absolute manual block-signal system between Independence and Rock Creek Junction, a distance of 3.6 miles, within which territory the accident occurred. The accident occurred at a point approximately 1.6 miles west of Independence, approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for 1,400 feet, followed by a 3° curve to the right 1,883 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 1,039.8 feet from its eastern end. The grade is descending for westbound trains, being 1.101 per cent at the point of accident.

The track is laid with 100-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with about 21 ties to the rail-length, tie-plated on curves of 3° or more, double-spiked on the gauge side of the rails, and ballasted with crushed stone to a depth of about 30 inches, anti-rail creepers are also used. The general maintenance of the track was good. Passenger trains are limited to a speed of 50 miles per hour.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 7.17 p. m.

## Description

Westbound passenger train No. 21 consisted of one baggage and mail car, one baggage and express car, one combination baggage and smoking car, one chair car, one dining car, and one parlor car, in the order named, hauled by engine 607, and was in charge of Conductor Jones and Engineman Netton. This train left Independence, the last open office, at 7 13 p.m., on time, and on reaching a point approximately 1.6 miles beyond that point it was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 40 and 45 miles per hour.

Engine 607, its tender, the first four cars and the forward truck of the fifth car were derailed. The engine and tender were derailed to the south or left and came to rest on their left sides down a 10-foot embankment, parallel with and about 15 feet from the track, the head end of the engine was 875 feet west of the point of derailment. The first four cars were derailed to the north or right; none of them was entirely overturned, nor was any of the derailed equipment badly damaged. The employee killed was the fireman.

## Summary of evidence

At a point about 125 feet east of the point of derailment indications were found of small stones having been placed on the outside rail of the curve, these stones evidently were taken from the track ballast. They had been crushed almost to powder and were found on both sides of the base of the rail and also on the ties. It further appeared that a hollow brick had been similarly placed on the outside rail, the crushed material being found on both sides of the base of the rail and on the ties, and other fragments of the same material were found in close proximity thereto. A 1 1/8 inch nut was found within a few feet of the point of derailment, battered on the top side and with abrasions on the bottom side, apparently this nut had been run over, although it was not badly distorted nor was there any imprint on the head of the rail which would have definitely determined its location. There was a light flange mark on the running surface of the outside rail starting at the point of derailment and continuing for a distance of 23 feet, beyond which point there was a very light flange mark on the outside of the base of the south rail and on the ties on the gauge side of the north rail. These marks continued on the ties on the left sides of both rails for a distance of approximately 442 feet, at which point the marks left the ends of the ties on the south side of the track, the track then being torn up for a distance of about 335 feet. These light

marks indicated that only the load wheels of the engine truck were at first derailed and were held close to the rails by the safety chains, and that the entire engine truck was derailed at the point where the marks left the ties, causing the ties to bunch and resulting in the final derailment.

Engineman Wetton stated that he noticed nothing wrong with the engine, either in its riding qualities or otherwise, and that the headlight was burning properly. Approaching the curve on which the accident occurred he made an 8 or 10-pound brake-pipe reduction in order to steady the train around the curve, and left the brakes applied. While rounding the curve at a speed of not more than 45 miles per hour he saw what appeared to be a tie lying lengthwise against the gauge side of the south rail, only a short distance ahead of the engine. The object then passed from his view and instantly he heard a roaring noise, as if the engine had struck something. He immediately applied the air brakes in emergency and then leaned out of the window, apparently the engine-truck wheels were sliding and he saw a little stream of fire coming from the engine truck, and after traveling an additional distance of about twice its own length the engine started to bounce on the ties, finally turning over to the left. Engineman Wetton estimated that the speed had been reduced to about 25 miles per hour by the time the engine overturned. When told that there was a hand-car set-off, consisting of planks between the rails, in the immediate vicinity of the point of derailment, Engineman Wetton said this probably was the object that he at first thought was a tie against the gauge side of the south rail. He was satisfied, however, that the accident was caused by some obstruction on the outside or high rail of the curve. None of the other members of the crew was aware of anything wrong until the air brakes were applied in emergency, their statements brought out nothing additional of importance, nor were they able to determine the cause of the accident.

Section Foreman Jarman stated that he last inspected the track, from his motor car, about three hours before the accident occurred, and found it to be in good condition. He arrived at the scene of the accident about twenty minutes after its occurrence and found brick dust on each side of the base of the outside rail of the curve and on the ties. There was also a nut that had been run over, this nut not being of the kind used in track work. In his opinion the accident was due to an obstruction on the high rail of the curve. Section Foreman Jarman said that there is considerable trespassing over this section

of track and that on one or two occasions he had removed spikes from the running surfaces of the rails, while on one occasion a passenger train was derailed and at another time a motor car was derailed, both on account of obstructions on the rails.

Master Mechanic Ray found the nut that showed indications of having been run over by a wheel. He also saw the brick dust and crushed stones on both sides of the base of the rail at the point of accident, and in addition found some small pieces of tile and brick, while about three or four rail-lengths east of that point there was evidence that stones had been placed on the high rail of the curve at six different places, 2 feet apart. Inspection of the engine at the scene disclosed no defect that would have caused the accident, and after the engine had been rerailed and the engine truck placed in proper position, the engine was moved to Slater, 84.8 miles from Independence, on its own wheels without incident. Master Mechanic Ray was of the opinion that the nut placed on the outside rail of the curve raised the engine truck-wheel flange high enough for it to drop on top of the running surface of the rail.

Assistant General Roadmaster Kleine and Supervisor Myers arrived at the scene of the accident about five hours after its occurrence. They saw the brick dust on the rail and the nut that had been run over, and said that in their opinion the accident was caused by the nut having been placed on the high rail of the curve.

Vincent Williamson, aged 18, who said he had escaped from a home for feeble-minded persons at Salem, Oreg., on June 1, 1927, confessed that he placed the nut on the outside rail of the curve, as well as several rocks, with malicious intent, and that he supported the nut on the rail with a piece of rock on one side and a piece of brick on the other side. He gave as his reason for his actions the fact that he wanted to go to Chicago and had boarded a Chicago & Alton freight train with this idea in mind, but that he was put off the freight train and this aroused his anger and caused him to decide to wreck a train. He also confessed to attempting to wreck a train on the Union Pacific Railroad in the vicinity of Lenape, Kans., during the night of March 7, 1928, in company with Thaddens W. Atkins, aged 17, on this occasion rocks, a spike, an old broken brake-shoe, a piece of coal and a big iron plug were placed on the rails. These obstructions, however, were discovered by an employee of the Union Pacific Railroad and removed.

On March 9, 1928, these boys pleaded guilty to placing these obstructions on the rails of the Union Pacific Railroad in an attempt to wreck a train and were sentenced to serve from 5 to 10 years in the Kansas State Reformatory at Hutchinson, Kans. The Williamson boy is also said to have stated that he was in the company of Harry Lemp, who escaped with him from the home for feeble-minded at Salem, Oreg., at the time one of them shot and killed a special officer of the Union Pacific Railroad in the yard of that railroad at Lopeka, Kans., in August, 1927, after the special officer had ordered them out of the yard.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by obstructions being placed on the high rail of a curve with malicious intent.

The evidence indicated that obstructions in the form of a nut, and pieces of brick, stone and tile, had been placed on the high rail of the curve, and this was confirmed by the subsequent confession of an 18-year old boy, who said he put these obstructions on the rail with the intention of wrecking a train, apparently with the idea of obtaining revenge for having been put off a freight train a few hours previously. It appeared that this boy had escaped from an institution for the feeble-minded, and that he had placed obstructions on railroad tracks on at least one other occasion.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.