

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
CHICAGO & NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY NEAR ARLINGTON
HEIGHTS, ILL., ON MARCH 18, 1930.

April 16, 1930.

To the Commission:

On March 18, 1930, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Chicago & North Western Railway, the wreckage being struck by an opposing passenger train on an adjacent track, near Arlington Heights, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 20 passengers, 9 employees, and 1 rail clerk.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Sub-division 4 of the Wisconsin Division, extending between Harvard and Chicago, Ill., a distance of 63.13 miles. In the 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 moving with the current of traffic keep to the left. The accident occurred at a private grade crossing located 4,615 feet east of the station at Arlington Heights; approaching this point from either direction, the track is tangent for more than 2 miles and the grade is practically level.

The private crossing had been planked recently by the railway company as a convenience to the Spencer, White & Prentis Company, contractors, in moving sewer pipe on a stone boat, or skid, from one side of the tracks to the other, and was protected by a flagman furnished by the railway between the hours of 7 a. m. and 7 p. m., except Sunday, in accordance with an agreement made by the railway with the contractors.

It was dark and clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 8.55 p. m.

Description

Employees of the Spencer, White & Prentis Company, sewer contractors, were moving two pieces of sewer pipe, each 4 feet in length and about 66 inches in diameter, and

weighing about 6,400 pounds, across the main line from the south to the north side of the tracks by means of a skid which was being towed by a tractor. The clevis on the cable which was used to couple the skid to the tractor broke when the skid reached the eastbound track, and the contractors' employees were unable to remove the skid from the track before the arrival of train No. 516.

Eastbound passenger train No. 516 consisted of one mail car, two express cars, one baggage car, one smoking car, three coaches, one dining car, and one parlor car, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 1628, and was in charge of Conductor McGirr and Engineman McClosky. This train departed from Harvard, Ill., 40.34 miles west of Arlington Heights, at 7.56 p. m., three minutes late, passed Arlington Heights three or four minutes late, and was derailed when it struck the skid at the private crossing while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 40 and 45 miles per hour.

Westbound passenger train No. 687 consisted of one combination baggage and smoking car and four coaches, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 1087, and was in charge of Conductor Condon and Engineman Kutzner. This train departed from Des Plaines, Ill., 5.73 miles east of Arlington Heights, at 8.45 p. m., on time, and collided with the wreckage of train No. 516 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 45 and 50 miles per hour.

Engine 1628, of train No. 516, came to rest on its right side across both main tracks at a point approximately 500 feet beyond the crossing. The first and fourth cars also came to rest on their right sides across both tracks, while the second and third cars remained upright. The fifth, sixth and seventh cars were derailed and leaned toward the westbound main track, and the front truck of the eighth car was derailed, the last two cars in train No. 516 not being derailed. Engine 1087, of train No. 687, stripped itself from the frame and the boiler came to rest on top of engine 1628, while the tender turned over toward the right. The first car in train No. 687 was practically destroyed, and the front truck of the second car was derailed. None of the remaining equipment in train No. 687 was derailed or damaged. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 687, while those injured were the fireman, conductor, baggageman-collector, and flagman of train No. 687, and the engineman, fireman, head brakeman, and two dining-car employees, of train No. 516.

Summary of evidence

Engineman McClosky, of train No. 516, stated that after leaving Arlington Heights he was looking ahead through the front window, which was open, and was moving at a speed between 50 and 60 miles per hour when he saw three men near the private crossing, then about 500 or 600 feet distant, one of the men was between the rails of the eastbound track swinging a red lantern back and forth, while the other two were north of the tracks, one of these men had a white lantern, and possibly the other had a red lantern. He also saw a large tile or sewer pipe which appeared to be just north of the north rail, but not clear of the track, and immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, opened the sanders and sounded the whistle. The brakes took hold immediately and he thought the speed had been reduced to about 40 or 45 miles per hour when his engine struck the pipe. The men at the crossing ran over toward the north or fireman's side, and he did not see what became of them. When he climbed out of the engine cab, he saw the headlight of a westbound train only a short distance away, so he ran up along the south side of the westbound track to the point where several men were standing along a passing track just south of the main tracks. One of these men had a white lantern, which he took from him and gave violent stop signals, but by that time the pilot of the engine was about opposite him and he threw the lantern at the fireman's side of the cab as it passed him. He did not see the fireman looking out of the window, nor did he hear any whistle sounded before the collision occurred. Engineman McClosky did not go back to the crossing afterwards, nor did he subsequently see anything of the men who attempted to flag his own train. He further stated that the headlight of his own engine was burning brightly at the time of the accident.

The statements of Fireman Ping, of train No. 516, practically corroborated those of Engineman McClosky although he said that approaching the crossing he was busy attending to the fire and did not see the men at the crossing, nor the pipe, until the engineman called him over to his side of the cab; they were then about two car-lengths from the crossing, and it appeared to him that there were two pieces of pipe on the track and another just to the left or north of the track. He noticed one man had a red lantern, but did not see him swinging it. Fireman Ping followed Engineman McClosky up the track when he attempted to flag the westbound train, and as the train passed him he noticed nothing that would indicate whether or not the brakes had been applied in emergency, but he heard the whistle sounded just before the collision. The statements

of Conductor McGirr, Baggage man Kirchen and Brakeman Salsman, of train No. 516, brought out nothing additional of importance, except that they estimated the speed of their train at the time the brakes were applied in emergency to have been between 40 and 50 miles per hour.

Flagman Frost, of train No. 516, stated that he was riding in the rear car when he felt the air brakes applied in emergency, and as soon as the train stopped he went to the rear platform and got off on the left side, and as he looked ahead, he saw a large pipe to the left of the train. He then went around to the right side and saw that the westbound track was blocked by cars of his own train, he also saw several men approaching, and they told him that the train had struck a load of pipe. One of the men had a lighted red lantern, and the others had white lanterns. At about that time, he heard a whistle from a westbound train and realizing the possibility of a collision, he at once lighted a red fusee and gave it to one of the men and told him to go around the head end of his train and try to stop the westbound train. Flagman Frost then proceeded toward Arlington Heights to protect the rear of his own train, which had stopped with the head end of the ninth car about on the crossing, and on his way back he saw no one who might have been flagging. He further stated that when he first saw the men with the red lantern, he was about two and one-half car-lengths west of the crossing, or 10 or 15 feet from the rear of his train.

The chef of the dining-car on train No. 516 stated that as soon as the train came to a stop, he assisted the steward of the dining car, who had been knocked down, and then went to the coach at the head end of the dining car and opened the vestibule door on the left side. He saw three men, and two of these men had red lanterns, but he was not sure whether or not the other man had a white or a red lantern. He asked them what happened, and one of them answered, "What is the matter with that engineer, we tried to flag him down but he didn't pay no attention to us."

One of the dining-car cooks stated that he followed the chef off the train, and saw the three men standing at the crossing; one of them had a red lantern, and he thought he saw a red and a white lantern on the bank about 10 feet west of the crossing.

Fireman Munson, of train No. 687, stated that he was unaware of anything wrong until their engine struck engine 1628. He had been attending to the fire after leaving Mount Prospect, 2.78 miles east of Arlington Heights, and when he saw the headlight of engine 1628, apparently, about

150 feet distant, it appeared to be on the eastbound track. He said the engineman was looking straight ahead, with his hand on the brake valve, but the brakes were not applied before the collision. Fireman Munson said that he himself was looking out of his side window and did not notice any one on his side of the engine with a white lantern. He also stated that the engineman had dimmed the headlight after leaving Mount Prospect, and that the headlight on engine 1628 was also dimmed. He estimated the speed of their train at the time of the accident to have been between 40 and 45 miles per hour.

Conductor Condon, of train No. 687, stated that there was no application of the air brakes before the accident occurred, nor was the whistle sounded, and he thought the train was traveling at a speed between 45 and 50 miles per hour. The statements of Baggage-man-Collector Service and Rear Brakeman Edgar corroborated those of the conductor.

Laborer Miller, employed by the Spencer, White & Prentiss Company, stated that he works from 4 p. m. until midnight, and on the night of the accident he was driving a tractor pulling a skid, with two cement sewer pipes on it, from the south side of the tracks over the crossing to the north side. The skid was attached to the tractor with two clevises. On reaching the last rail on the north side, one of the clevises broke and upon attempting to pull the skid with the one clevis, that one also broke. Laborer Miller then drove the tractor behind the skid and pushed off the two sections of pipe, and then tried to push the skid off the track, but he was unable to move it. He then saw a train approaching from the west and his second helper, Laborer Cataldo, started up the track with a red lantern to flag it, going a distance of about 1,700 feet. Laborer Miller then drove the tractor back over to the south side and also took a red lantern and followed Laborer Cataldo, while his first helper, Laborer Machnik, stayed near the pipe with a white lantern. Laborer Miller further stated that he had no instructions as to flagging trains, and that one of the men always looked in both directions before they started across the tracks.

The statements of Laborer Machnik corroborated those of Laborer Miller as to their movements over the crossing, and he added that as the two men ran toward the approaching train, the engineman sounded the whistle several times; one of the men was in the middle of the eastbound track while the other was between the two main tracks. He stated that it had been his practice to go ahead on the tracks and look in both directions and if there were no trains in sight, he would tell Laborer Miller to come across. There was a bright white light on the front of the tractor and a red light on each rear corner of the skid.

The statements of Laborers Miller and Machnik were made in the presence of Special Agents of the Railway Company and the Justice of the Peace for Cook County, and these special agents said that Laborer Cataldo, who was also present, stated that he could give no further information to that given by the other two men and he signed his name to the statements made by them. At the time of this investigation by the Commission's inspectors, however, Laborer Cataldo could not be located. Roadmaster O'Connell stated that on February 20 he became aware of the fact that the construction company was using this crossing without providing proper protection and an agreement was made whereby a flagman was furnished by the railway company from 7 a. m. to 7 p. m., except Sunday, to protect the crossing, and at no time was there any understanding that pipe was to be hauled over the tracks after 7 p. m. or before 7 a. m., and he was entirely unaware of the fact that the crossing was being used during the night.

Crossing Flagman Peterson, who had been assigned to protect the movement of trains while pipe was being skidded over the main tracks, stated that the skid made a trip over the crossing about once every hour, and he had witnessed accidents to loads on three different occasions, once when a section of pipe rolled off the skid; the next time, part of the skid caught in the flange of the rail, and another time the cable came off, but no trains were due on any of these occasions. He had also observed movements across the tracks about three times a week after dark, when no lanterns were used.

Superintendent Campbell stated that neither the roadmaster, trainmaster nor himself was aware that pipe was being hauled across this crossing after 7 p. m., and it seemed to him that in view of the fact that it had been outlined to the construction company that protection was necessary, they should have taken some steps to inform the railway of any movements over the crossing they contemplated making during the night, as without question, night operation of this kind would involve a greater hazard than would operations during the day time.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the attempt of contractors' employees to move heavy sections of pipe across the tracks of the railway without any flag protection having been provided.

According to the statements of the crew of train No. 516, it appears that none of the laborers had gone up the track any distance to flag the train, as claimed in

the statement of Laborer Miller, who said that Laborer Cataldo went up the track 1,700 feet. Engineeran McClosky and Fireman Ring both stated that they saw men with lanterns near the crossing, just before the derailment occurred, and within a few seconds after the train had come to a stop, two dining-car employees and the train flagman talked with the men, who were then in the immediate vicinity of the crossing. Under these circumstances, it is believed they were also in the immediate vicinity of the crossing when the accident occurred, and that no flagging was done except from that point, at a time when it was too late to stop the approaching train.

In view of the fact that it was outlined to the contractors by the officials of the railway that proper protection was necessary during the time that pipe was to be hauled over the tracks at the private crossing, and arrangements were made for a flagman to be stationed at the crossing between 7 a. m. and 7 p. m., it was very poor judgment on the part of the contractors in not notifying the railway company that such movements were being continued during the night time, so that proper protection could be afforded, especially as night operations obviously were attended by greater hazards than day operations.

All of the railroad 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.