

In re investigation of accident which occurred on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy R. R., near Liberty, Mo., on January 1, 1915.

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On January 1, 1915, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, near Liberty, Mo., resulting in the injury of fifteen passengers and two employees. After an investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on the division which extends from Cameron Jct., Mo., to Kansas City, Mo., a distance of 54.3 miles. It is a single track line, used jointly by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroads, the movement of trains being governed by time table, train orders and automatic block signals.

At Liberty, Mo., a station 15 miles east of Kansas City, there is a passing track located on the south side of the main track. The east switch is 450 feet east of the station, and the track extends westward 3,200 feet. About 700 feet west of the station is located a crossover connecting the siding with the main track. Approaching the scene of the accident from the east there is a 4-degree curve toward the south, 400 feet in length, followed by a tangent 2,100 feet in length, in turn followed by a 2-degree curve to the south 1,100 feet in length. It was at the east point of this curve, about 250 feet east of the west switch of the passing track, that the collision occurred.

At this point there is a shallow cut 600 feet in length and a slight grade ascending westward. Located 450 feet west of the west switch of the passing track is an automatic home block signal, and 2,400 feet west of it, is an automatic distant block signal, both of which govern east-bound trains.

Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific west-bound train No. 257 consisted of engine 869, a combination car, a baggage car, a smoker and a chair car, all of steel construction; also two Pullman sleeping cars and a dining car of wooden construction. Engineman McGregor and Conductor Jacks were in charge of this train. At Cameron Jct., Mo., they received train order No. 33 reading as follows:

"No. 257 will run 1 hour and 20 minutes late instead of 1 hour late, Cameron Jct. to Birmingham."

The train departed from Cameron Jct. at 8:02 a.m., 1 hour and 22 minutes late. At Kearney they received train order No. 42 reading as follows:

"One car just west of crossover on passing track of Liberty."

The train arrived at Liberty at 9:23 am, 1 hour 43 minutes late, and was unable to proceed farther against east-bound train No. 14, which was superior by direction and was due at Liberty at 9:34 a.m. In order to avoid delay to two following trains the conductor and engine-man of train 257 decided to pull down to the extreme west end of the siding and there wait on the main tract for the arrival of train No. 14, which they would head in on the siding. No. 257 left Liberty station about 9:26 a.m., and stopped to clear the west end of the siding. The train had been standing here two or three minutes when it was struck by train No. 14.

Chicago, Burlington & Quincy east-bound train No. 14 consisted of engine 621, a combination car and coach, both cars being of wooden construction. At Birmingham, Mo., 5.7 miles west of Liberty, Engineman Edwards and Conductor Wise, who were in charge of this train, received order No. 42, quoted above, also, order No. 46, which reads as follows:

"No. 14 will meet No. 203 and No. 211 at Liberty. No. 14 will head in at crossover at Liberty."

No. 14 departed from Birmingham at 9:25 a.m., on time, and while running at a speed of about 30 miles per hour collided with No. 257, which was standing about 250 feet east of the west switch of the passing track at Liberty.

The force of the collision drove No. 257 backward about 6 feet and badly damaged both locomotives. None of the cars was derailed.

Engineman McGregor of train 257 states that he expected to find an order at Liberty helping him against No. 14. For that reason, and as No. 14 was not at that time due to leave Birmingham, he did not take the siding at the east end of the passing track, but proceeded down the main track to the station. He was given a clearance card by the Operator, and not receiving any order giving his train time on No. 14 he conferred with the Conductor. The Conductor informed him that No. 14 was going to meet Nos. 203 and 211 at Liberty and then said, "All right, pull down and head No. 14 in at the west end." He states that he then pulled his train down and stopped clear of the west switch of the passing track, and had been standing there about two minutes when the fireman shouted, "Isn't that fellow going to hit us?" He looked out and when he saw No. 14 approaching jumped off. No. 14 was about 250 feet away when he realized that it was not going to stop. He then did not have time to start his train backward. He states that it is customary when meeting No. 14 for that train to take the siding. He further states that as No. 14 was to meet Nos. 203 and 211 at Liberty, and as he could see the block signal west of the passing track switch set at stop, he believed that it was safe to proceed to the west passing track switch against No. 14 without further protection.

Conductor Jacks of train 257 states that his train arrived at Liberty about 9:22 a.m., and the train order signal was set at stop,

The operator gave him a clearance card and told him that No. 14 was to meet Nos. 203 and 211 at Liberty. He then arranged with the engineman to pull down to the west switch of the passing track and head No. 14 in on the siding. The train left Liberty station about 9:26, and shortly afterwards he said to the porter, "We want to head 14 in; look out for them." The train stopped at the west end about 9:28 and the collision occurred at 9:31, at which time the porter was just getting off the steps of the smoker, the third car in the train. He further states that it is not the practice to proceed against a superior train in this manner, but the general situation and the two trains behind him prompted him to make this move, and at that time he thought it could be done in safety without the protection of a flagman.

Fireman Davidson of train No. 257 states that nothing was said to him about going ahead to open the switch for No. 14, and that his train had been standing about two or three minutes when the accident occurred. He further states that he saw the automatic block signal, located west of the switch, in the stop position when train No. 14 was approaching.

Fireman Gunther of train No. 14 states that approaching the home signal west of Liberty he saw that it was in the stop position, and he said to Engineman Edwards, "They are down there;" at the investigation he interpreted this statement to mean that "The signal is at stop and 203 is waiting east of the crossover." The first intimation he had of the impending accident was when the engineman applied the brakes, about 200 feet west of the point of collision. He further states that while it is not the custom to run by a stop signal to take a siding, in some instances it has been done, reducing speed to about five miles per hour. He is unable to account for the failure of Engineman Edwards to stop for the block signal in this case.

Engineman Edwards of train No. 14 was seriously injured in the collision.

Conductor Wise of train No. 14 states that his train left Birmingham at 9:25 a.m., and the first intimation he had of an impending accident was the application of the air brakes about 100 feet west of the passing track switch. He was riding in the smoker at the time and knows nothing as to the position of the block signal. He further states that the brakes were in good working order; also, that it has not been the custom for an inferior train to hold the main line and compel a train superior by direction to pull in and afterward back out, as was contemplated in this case.

Operator Thompson at Liberty states that when No. 257 arrived at Liberty he expected that it was going to Birmingham to meet No. 14, and with that in mind he gave the engineman and conductor a clearance card. The conductor afterward told him that they would remain at Liberty for No. 14. He stated that he should then have withdrawn the clearance

card, but failed to do so. It has not been the custom for trains to proceed to the west end of the siding against superior trains in this manner.

Train Dispatcher Fox states that No. 14 usually takes the siding at Liberty when these trains meet, but in this instance he expected No. 257 would take the siding for No. 14, and allow Nos. 203 and 211 to pass in case No. 14 was delayed.

The automatic block signals in this territory are of the two-position, lower quadrant, semaphore type; they are so controlled that a train standing at Liberty Station would hold the home signal at the west end of the passing track in the stop position. The fact that No. 257 was standing at Liberty station before No. 14 departed from Birmingham, together with the statements of witnesses, shows conclusively that the home signal at the west end of the passing track was in the stop position when No. 14 approached and passed it.

The physical conditions surrounding the point of accident were such that a view of the block signal at the west end of the passing track could not be obtained from a westbound train until it had reached a point about 300 feet west of the station. The engine crew of No. 14 had a good view of the home signal for a distance of about 600 feet. On account of the cut and the curve it would be impossible for the engineman of an approaching train to determine whether a train standing at the west end of the passing track was standing on the main track or on the siding until he had reached a point about 300 feet from the switch.

The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

This accident was caused by Train No. 257 occupying the main track on the time of a superior train without proper protection, for which Conductor Jacks and Engineman McGregor are responsible. General Rules 86, 87, and 88 provide as follows:

"86. An inferior train must keep out of the way of a superior train.

"87. A train failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule, must be protected as provided in rule 99.

"88. At meeting points between trains of the same class, the inferior train must clear the main track before the leaving time of the superior train, and must pull into siding when practicable. If necessary to back in the train must first be protected, as per Rule 99, unless otherwise provided."

These rules required that No. 257 should have taken the siding at the east end of the passing track or the train should have been properly protected. These rules were not obeyed. The westbound train proceeded down the main track about 3,000 feet beyond the point

where it should have taken the siding against No. 14, a superior train, and stood at that point from two to three minutes, no attempt being made to provide proper protection.

In depending upon the block signal at the west end of the passing track for protection, Conductor Jacks and Engineman McGregor also violated General Rule 502, which reads as follows:

"502. Block signals control the use of blocks, but, unless otherwise provided, do not affect the movement of trains under the time-table or train rules; nor dispense with the use or the observance of other signals whenever and wherever they may be required."

A contributing cause of this accident was the failure of Engineman Edwards of train No. 14 to obey the block signal indication; as this signal was in the stop position, he should have brought his train to a stop before passing it, notwithstanding the order directing his train to enter the siding at the crossover. Had he properly observed this signal indication the accident undoubtedly would have been averted.

A further contributing cause was the failure of Operator Thompson to obey the following Time-table rule:

"Passenger trains holding main track, when meeting other trains, must remain at station, and clearance card must be withheld until the train to be met clears the main track."

Had he obeyed this rule No. 257 would not have been permitted to leave Liberty station until No. 14 had arrived and cleared the main track.

In this instance the Railroad Company had provided adequate rules, and had equipped its line with automatic block signals, but these rules and the signal indications were not obeyed. As long as employees disregard the rules and signals which are provided for their safety and protection such accidents are bound to occur.

All of the employees involved in this accident were experienced men, and none of them were on duty in violation of the revisions of the Hours of Service Act.