

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN AN INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE & ST. PAUL RAILWAY NEAR POYNETTE, WIS., ON MARCH 26, 1923

April 13, 1923.

To the Commission

On March 26, 1923 there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway near Poynette, Wis., which resulted in the death of 3 employees, and the injury of 12 passengers, 1 express messenger, and 1 employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on a subdivision of the La Crosse Division extending between East Madison and Portage, a distance of 35.7 miles. This is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. Approaching the point of accident from the west, the track is tangent for 3,251 feet, then there is a curve of 20' to the left, 600 feet in length, a curve of 3° to the left 995.5 feet in length, a tangent 49.9 feet in length and a curve of 3° 30' to the left 628.6 feet in length, the accident occurring at a point 278 feet from the leaving end of this curve, at bridge C-714, located about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles east of the station at Poynette. The grade for eastbound trains for 3,000 feet approaching the point of accident is ascending, varying from 1.412 to 1.077 per cent, being 1.077 per cent at the point of accident. On account of the curve, the engineer of an eastbound train can not obtain a view of bridge C-714, while trees near the right-of-way obstruct the fireman's view until within 200 feet of the bridge. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 7:55 a. m.

Description

Eastbound passenger train No. 516 consisted of one express car and two coaches, hauled by engine 515, and was in charge of Conductor Wadsworth and Engineer Rolleston. This train left Poynette at 7.50 a. m., 19 minutes late, and was derailed at bridge C-714 while traveling at a speed of about 15 or 20 miles an hour.

Engine 515 came to rest with the head end elevated on the opposite bank of the stream in an almost upright position, considerably damaged, the tender was standing vertically on its head end, fast against the boiler head. The express car was demolished, the first coach came to rest with the rear end on the west bank and the head end at the bottom of the stream bed. The employees killed were the engineman, fireman and baggagerman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Madsworth of train No 515, stated that after leaving Poynette he was taking up transportation in the rear coach. The first he knew of anything wrong was when there was a sudden crash which knocked him down. On going to the head end of the train he found that the bridge had been burned, but could advance no probable cause of the fire. Brakeran Lucas said he felt a slight lurch and thought there was an emergency application of the air brakes just prior to the crash.

Section Foreman Babcock, who has charge of this section of the track, stated that he was riding on train No 515 at the time of the accident, en route to the next station east of Poynette, and was stationed in the rear car so that he could observe the condition of the track. He stated that after the accident he examined the bridge and found it completely burned out except the wooden abutments at each end. He also said there is no regular track patrol over that section of the track and that the last time he passed over the bridge was on Saturday, two days previously, at which time it seemed to be in good condition. He further stated the ground was covered with snow around and under the bridge, while the grass and weeds were burned over last fall.

Bridge C-714 was a 3-bent wooden bridge, 48 feet long, constructed of cedar piling and fir timbers. The deck of this bridge was covered, for fire protection, with galvanized sheet iron, but in order to provide a track circuit for the operation of crossing warning bells a strip of this covering about 4 inches wide was cut out along the inside of the south rail for the entire length of the bridge. The deck of the bridge was about 8 feet above the stream bed at the highest point.

Freight extra 2385 passed over this bridge the afternoon of the preceding day and this was the last train which passed over it prior to the accident. The grates on the engine were shaken considerably on the ascending grade in the vicinity of the bridge, the coal being of poor quality.

From the fact that the day previous had been very windy, it is thought possible that the fire originated from live coals dropped by the engine of extra 2585, which were later fanned into flame by the high wind. The location of the bridge renders a view of it impossible from a nearby highway, as well as from neighboring farm houses, the nearest of which is more than $\frac{1}{4}$ mile distant, this, coupled with the fact that the actual fire probably occurred in the early morning hours, would account for the blaze having been unnoticed.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by a burned bridge

From careful examination of the remains of the bridge, it is thought that the fire resulted from a live coal dropped from a passing train

None of the employees involved in this accident had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law

Respectfully submitted,

W P Borland,

Director