

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE ERIE RAILROAD NEAR CONESUS LAKE JUNCTION,
N. Y., ON AUGUST 22, 1925.

December 22, 1925.

To the Commission

On August 22, 1925, there was a derailment of a mixed train on the Erie Railroad near Conesus Lake Junction, N. Y., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Lakeville Branch of the Rochester Division, extending between Conesus Lake Junction and Lakeville, N. Y., a distance of 1.68 miles, this being a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred on a slight fall, at a point 1,828 feet east of Conesus Lake Junction; approaching this point from the east there is a 1° curve about 350 feet in length, followed by 825 feet of tangent, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point 235 feet from its eastern end. Beginning at Lakeville the grade for westbound trains is 0.5 per cent ascending for about 550 feet, 0.73 per cent descending for about 1,200 feet, 0.44 per cent ascending for about 2,400 feet, level for about 1,100 feet, then 1.5 per cent ascending for a distance of 360 feet to the point of accident and for some distance beyond. The track is laid with 80-pound rails, 30 feet in length, with about 16 ties to the rail-length, and ballasted with cinders to a depth of about 12 inches.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 7.57 a.m.

Description

Westbound mixed train no. 479 consisted of one coach, one baggage car, and two milk cars in the order named, hauled by engine 892, which was being operated backing up, and was in charge of Conductor Cullen and Enginemen Brothers. This train departed from Lakeville at 7.55 a.m., according to the train sheet, 20 minutes late, after receiving a train order which had been made complete at 7.54 a.m., and was derailed on reaching a point 5,482 feet west of the station.

The entire train was derailed to the south or left, engine 892 together with its tender and the first car in the train, being overturned, while the last three cars remained practically upright on the roadbed. The head and rear ends of the train were 291 feet and 55 feet, respectively, west of the initial point of derailment. The employee killed was the engineman.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Masters stated that on the eastbound trip he had noticed nothing unusual as to track conditions between Conesus Lake Junction and Lakeville. Just prior to the accident he was standing in the gangway, leaning on the chain, on the fireman's side of the engine looking back toward Lakeville. He did not think the speed had been in excess of 15 miles an hour at any time after leaving Lakeville, and estimated it to have been about 12 miles an hour at the time of the accident. He did not know whether or not the air brakes were applied at the time the accident occurred.

Conductor Cullen also thought the track at the point of derailment was in good condition, and on passing over it enroute to Lakeville on the trip prior to the accident he noticed nothing irregular. His statements indicated that his train left Lakeville at about 7.54.30 a.m. and that the accident occurred between 7.56 and 7.57 a.m., about 15 seconds after he had noticed an application of the air brakes, and he was of the opinion that the accident might have been caused by the engine being operated at excessive speed while backing up. He stated however that he was in the car which overturned, and after going to Lakeville for assistance he did not again return to the scene and therefore did not definitely ascertain what caused the accident.

Brakemen Adams and Cushine stated that the air

brakes were tested and worked properly, that the track appeared to be in good condition, and that they had not paid any particular attention to the speed of the train en route. Afterwards they saw marks on the ties but did not see anything to indicate the cause of the accident.

General Foreman Biser said that he found the throttle about one-third open, with the reverse lever about three notches from the center in back motion, while the brake valve was in the emergency position. He made a careful examination of the engine but found nothing about it which in his opinion could have contributed to the occurrence of the accident. He also said that he examined the track, but could not find anything irregular, and from his examination of the track and equipment, the position of the throttle and reverse lever, and the general appearance of the wreckage, he reached the conclusion that the accident was caused by excessive speed.

Assistant Division Engineer Bowers said he reached the scene at 11 a.m. and made measurements of the track but was unable to find anything wrong either with the gauge or surface. After making his detailed inspection of the track he concluded that the accident was due to excessive speed, in view of the fact that after being derailed the train traveled a distance of 291 feet, two-thirds of which was on an ascending grade of 1.5 per cent and about one-third on a grade of 2.25 per cent, destroying the track throughout the greater portion of this distance, he thought that had the speed been within the limit of 15 miles an hour the train would not have traveled such a great distance after having been derailed.

In connection with the investigation of this accident it was confirmed as nearly as possible that the train order received by the crew of this train at Lakeville was made complete at 7.54 a.m., and that the train departed not later than 7.55 a.m., possibly a few seconds earlier than that time. Conductor Cullen said the accident occurred between 7.56 and 7.57 a.m., while an examination of the engineman's watch, which had been broken as a result of the accident, showed that it had stopped at 7.56.40 a.m. In this connection Conductor Cullen said that when comparing time on the morning of the accident the engineman's watch was 40 seconds slower than his own watch. These facts indicate the probability that the accident occurred not more than two minutes after the train left Lakeville.

The marks on the track disclosed that one or more wheels had run along on the top of the rail for a

distance of about 9 feet before dropping off on the ties. Beginning at a point 45 feet west of the initial point of derailment, the track was almost entirely torn up, the ties being destroyed, and the rails were broken and twisted for a distance of nearly 250 feet. Careful examination of the track by the Commission's inspectors failed to disclose any condition which in their opinion could have contributed to the occurrence of the accident.

Engine 892 is of the 4-6-0 type, having a total weight, engine and tender, loaded, of 232,400 pounds. The tender has two four-wheel trucks and a loaded weight of 87,900 pounds. Careful inspection of the engine and tender failed to disclose any defect that would have caused or contributed to the accident.

Conclusions

While the cause of this accident was not definitely ascertained, it is believed that it was due to the train being operated at an excessive rate of speed with the engine backing up.

Examination both of track and equipment failed to disclose anything which was thought to have contributed to the occurrence of the accident, and while the time consumed by train No. 439 in making the run of slightly more than 1 mile from Lakeville to the point of accident could not be determined with extreme accuracy it is not believed that the train consumed more than two minutes; that it was running at a speed which was in the neighborhood of 30 miles an hour seems probable in view of the fact that the entire train was derailed and traveled a distance of 291 feet, on a heavy ascending grade, practically destroying the track for a distance of more than 200 feet. The speed limit on this branch is 20 miles an hour, while under the rules an engine being operated backing up is restricted to a speed of 15 miles an hour. Had these restrictions been observed this accident probably would not have occurred.

All the 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.