

INV. NO. 323.

MARCH 1, 1916.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE GARY & INTERURBAN RAILROAD AT BROOKS, INDIANA ON  
JANUARY 1, 1916.

On January 1, 1916, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and an extra freight train on the Gary & Interurban Railroad at Brooks, Ind., which resulted in the death of 2 passengers and 1 employee, and the injury of 12 passengers and 5 employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

The division on which this accident occurred is a single-track line, extending from Woodville Junction, Ind., to La Porte, Ind., a distance of 30.3 miles. No block signal system is in use, trains being operated by time-table and train orders, excepting between Woodville Junction and Goodrum, six-tenths of a mile, where trains are moved under dispatcher's block. The collision occurred about 525 feet east of the station at Brooks, a station about 11 miles east of Woodville Junction, in about the middle of a tangent 17 miles in length. At the time of the accident there was a dense fog and a drizzling rain.

Westbound extra 3000, consisting of a work car, was in charge of Conductor Cole and Motorman Gates. It left La Porte at 9:45 a.m., having received a copy of train order No. 3, reading as follows:

"Motor three thousand 3000 will run extra La Porte to Goodrum and will meet number fifty-four 54 motor 400 at Brooks Road. Number fifty-three 53 of January 1st is annulled."

The train was approaching Brooks Road expecting to stop and head in on the spur track for the purpose of meeting train No. 54 when

that train was seen to be approaching. The air brakes were at once applied and the speed of the train had been reduced to about 10 miles per hour at the time of the collision.

Eastbound train No. 54 consisted of motor 400, and was in charge of Conductor Payne and Motorman Wickersham. It left Woodville Junction at 9:41 a.m., 11 minutes late, and at Goodrum received a copy of train order No. 5 quoted above. After stopping at Brooks and discharging passengers the train proceeded, colliding with extra 3000 at a point about 583 feet beyond the spur switch while running at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles per hour.

The passenger compartment of train No. 54 was telescoped a distance of about 15 feet by the extra. Motor 3000 was built higher than motor 400, having a drawbar height of 34 inches as compared with 28 inches in the case of motor 400. This allowed the body of motor 3000 to be forced over the end of motor 400, pushing out its sides and wrecking the interior of the car, but one seat being left intact in the passenger compartment.

Motorman Gates, of extra 3000, stated that at a point about one-quarter of a mile from Brooks he shut off the power and made a slight application of the air brakes. When he saw train No. 54 appear out of the fog a few feet away he applied the emergency brakes. He thought the speed of his train was 15 or 18 miles an hour when he made the first application of the air brakes, and that when he saw train No. 54 it was traveling about as fast as a man could walk.

Conductor Payne, of train No. 54 stated that at Goodrum he received the order to meet extra 3000 at Brooks. After the order

had been made complete he read it to the motorman and then gave it to him, not keeping a copy. The motorman then read it back to him. He stated that although required to make duplicate copies of all train orders he made only one copy, it being made on a page torn from the registry book. Approaching Brooks he remarked to the motorman that he wondered if extra 3000 had arrived at the meeting point, and the motorman replied that he did not know, but to get the telephone ready and if the extra had not reached there they would call the dispatcher. After stopping at Brooks to discharge passengers, he saw that the extra had not arrived, and after the passengers had been discharged he said to the motorman, "All right" and while the car moved ahead he started back toward the rear and for the purpose of getting the telephone. He had not forgotten the order to meet the extra and supposed that the motorman would pull ahead as far as the telephone booth, a distance of about two car lengths. When the car did not stop he thought it was taking a long time to reach the telephone booth and finally it occurred to him that possibly the extra had been in the siding and that he had not seen it. He then looked out of the window to see if the train had passed the telephone booth and when he saw that it had, he pulled the signal cord, the motorman immediately shutting off the power and applying the brakes. In a few seconds he saw extra 3000 approaching, the collision occurring almost immediately afterward. He thought the speed of his train at the time was from 12 to 15 miles per hour.

Motorman Pickering was killed in the accident and no reason can be assigned for his failure to remember train order No. 5.

Train Master Van Meter stated that the employees involved

in the accident had been examined and were considered to be competent men. He stated that it was customary for the conductor to telephone to the dispatcher in case a train arrived at a meeting point and the opposing train had not arrived, although rule 281 of the Rules and Regulations for the Government of Employees on Inter-urban Lines of this railroad requires that this duty be performed by the motorman. The trainmaster also stated that the first train to reach the meeting point was supposed to take the siding regardless of class or direction, this being done to avoid delay to the opposing train. There was no rule requiring this to be done, however, but he had always instructed employees to take the siding when their train was the first to arrive at the meeting point, and at one time he had posted a bulletin in regard to the matter. No copy of this bulletin, however, could be found.

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Payne and Motorman Wickersham, of train No. 56, to observe and obey train order No. 5, requiring their train to meet extra 3000 at Brooks. The statement of Conductor Payne indicated that as their train was approaching Brooks they discussed the meet order with extra 3000, and it seems clear that after passengers had been discharged at Brooks, Motorman Wickersham forgot train order No. 5, while the conductor in the meantime was engaged in getting out the telephone and did not notice that the train was proceeding until it was too late to avoid the collision.

Conductor Payne and Motorman Wickersham had been on duty less than 4 hours, after a period off duty of 13 hours and 20 minutes.

Rule 281 requires the motorman to call the dispatcher in

case his train arrives at a meeting point and does not find the train which is to be met at that point. It was customary, however, for this duty to be performed by the conductor, and it appears that the officials were cognizant of this practice. Had this rule been complied with, the conductor would have seen to it that the motorman called the dispatcher. In this way his attention would again have been directed to train order No. 5 and the accident undoubtedly would not have occurred.

It is also to be noted from Train Master Van Atter's statements that the first train to reach a meeting point was supposed to take the siding, regardless of class or direction, and that a bulletin to this effect had at one time been posted by him. This requirement is in conflict with rule No. 207, which reads as follows:

"At meeting points between trains, either by schedule or train order, should the train that is to occupy the main track arrive first, it will be the duty of the conductor of such train to promptly set the switch for the siding, so that the train to be met can take the siding with the least possible delay."

Acting under the impression that the first train to reach the meeting point should take the siding, in order to save time, the conductor allowed the train to proceed, supposing that the motorman would stop at the telephone booth, after which the train would proceed to the switch and back in on the spur. Had rule No. 207 been complied with then train No. 54, superior to extra 3000 by class and direction, would have remained on the main track at Brooks, the conductor going forward and opening the switch for the purpose of allowing the extra to head in on the spur track, and the accident would thus have been prevented.

Attention is also called to the fact that although the rules require that train orders be written on blanks provided for that purpose, as many carbon copies being made as are necessary, Conductor Payne did not bring his train order blanks into the telephone booth, but copied the order on a blank page torn from the train register, making only one copy of this order, which he delivered to the motorman.

This investigation disclosed a dangerous method of handling train orders, and in view of the fact that this accident probably could not have occurred had either rule No. 307 or rule No. 216 been obeyed by the employees at fault, it is evident that the officials of this road should at once take such steps as will insure proper compliance with rules providing for the safe handling of its trains.