

In re Investigation of an accident
which occurred on the Georgia
Railroad near Union Point,
Ga., October 27, 1916.

On October 27, 1916, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Georgia Railroad near Union Point, Ga., which resulted in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 1 express messenger. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

The main line of the Georgia Railroad, on which this accident occurred, is a single track line, extending between Augusta and Atlanta, Ga., a distance of 171 miles. Train movements are governed by time-table and train orders, the latter being transmitted by telephone. No block signal system is in use; eastbound trains are superior by direction, and trains in the same direction are spaced by rule.

Westbound passenger train No. 1, en route from Augusta to Atlanta, Ga., was in charge of Conductor Clary and Engineer Printup, and consisted of locomotive 202, 1 express car, 1 combination mail and baggage car, and 3 coaches, all of the cars being of wooden construction, with the exception of the express car, which had a steel underframe. This train left Augusta at 6.30 a. m., on time, passed Crawfordville, the last open telegraph office, 64.46 miles beyond Augusta and 11.66 miles east of Union Point, at 9.10 a. m., 14 minutes late, and at 9.27 a. m., while traveling at a speed of about 40 miles an hour, ran into an open switch--the east switch of the Union Point passing track, located about 4,500 feet east of the station at that place--and was derailed. Train No. 1 was 3 or 4 minutes late at the time of derailment.

The appearance of the wreckage indicated that the express car was the first to be derailed, its forward end leading off to the left, pulling the engine and tender from the rails and causing them to turn over on their left side. The trucks of the first car tore up the track and caused the derailment of the following three cars. Only the front truck of the fourth car was derailed, the rear truck remaining on the track, directly over the switch points. The rear car remained on the track. The engineer and fireman, and an air brake inspector, who was riding on the locomotive, were killed in the accident.

In the vicinity of the accident, the main track is laid with 80-pound rails, 33 feet in length, on about 20 pine ties to the rail, the track in general being well maintained.

The passing track is laid with 65-pound rails, the switch and lead rails, however, being 80-pound rails.

Approaching from the east there is a 2-degree curve to the right, 750 feet in length, followed by 2,172 feet of tangent to the switch, there being a .6% ascending grade for westbound trains for about 2,000 feet approaching the point of accident. Beginning at the eastern end of the tangent mentioned, the view of the switch is unobstructed. The passing siding involved is on the south side of the main track. The weather at the time of accident was clear.

The switch at which this accident occurred is a facing-point switch. It is operated by a Weir switchstand, located on the south side of the main track, the operating lever being about three feet above the base of the switch. The distance from the middle of the track to the center of the switchstand is 9 feet 3 inches; the distance from the base of the switch to the top of the target is 6 feet 9 inches. The target displays white when the switch is closed, and red when it is open. While the colors were only fairly distinguishable, it having been about six months since the target was last painted, it was learned, upon observation from the cab of a locomotive, under weather conditions similar to those prevailing at the time of accident, that the indications were plainly visible from a point 1,800 feet distant.

Conductor Clary stated that the speed of his train was 30 or 35 miles an hour, approaching the east switch of the Union Point passing track, that he felt the brakes being applied just before the derailment occurred; it was then 9.27 a. m. He stated that immediately after the accident he went to the locomotive, but neither saw nor heard anyone in need of assistance. He then went back to the switch and found it set for the passing track; and, upon looking at the switchstand, found the lever latched, the open lock, however, having been placed in the main-line latch. Conductor Clary stated that he thought he was the first person to examine the switch after the accident, he having seen no one near it, and that he called the attention of his flagman and other persons to the position of the switch. He further stated that the front truck of the third car was off the track, the wheels of the rear truck being over the switch points, making it impossible to change the switch. He stated that if there was any car, locomotive or hand car on the passing track at the time, it was at the west end, but that, so far as he knew, there was none. He also stated that the switch is just within yard limits, but that there was no particular speed at which trains were required to travel within yard limits.

Flagman Haukland stated that he thought the speed of his train approaching the point of derailment was 35 or 40 miles an hour, and that he felt an emergency application of

the brakes just before the derailment occurred. After the derailment he got out of the car in which he was riding and started back to flag. The conductor called to him when he was about half a car length beyond the train, and, on looking back, he saw the red indication of the switch target.

Engineman Brisendine, of extra 57, a westbound light engine which reached Union Point at 8.22 a. m., and which was the last train to pass the switch prior to the accident, stated that his train passed the switch at a speed of 15 or 17 miles an hour, and that the target then displayed the white indication, the switch being properly closed. He stated that the target, although on the left or fireman's side of the track, had been visible to him on this trip as his train was rounding the curve nearly one-half mile east of the point of accident, and that that would be a sufficient distance in which to bring to a stop a heavy freight train traveling at a speed of 25 or 30 miles an hour. He stated further that he did not see any person near the switch.

Track Foreman Caldwell stated that he and his men arrived at Union Point at 8.30 a. m., and during all of the interval between that time and the time of accident worked at a place about one-half mile west of the switch. He stated that he did not see any train use the south passing track during that time. He stated that he had a key to the switch, but that none of his men had one, and that his key was not out of his possession on the morning of the accident. He stated that he reached the point of accident about 10 minutes after its occurrence, his description of the switch corresponding with that of Conductor Clary. He further stated that there were quite a number of people hurrying to the scene of accident and he therefore did not look for any stranger or other person who might have thrown the switch.

Conductor Watson, of train No. 50, an eastbound passenger train on the Athens Division, the eastern terminus of which is Union Point, where train No. 50 arrived at 9.15 a. m., stated that he went to the point of accident immediately after its occurrence, and that when he reached the switchstand he closed the lock, which was in the main-line latch, in order to prevent any one from moving it. He further stated that the locomotive and first four cars were derailed, that the rear end of the third car leaned toward and blocked the main line, that the front truck of the fourth car was off the rails and the rear truck was standing over the switch points.

Supervisor Williams stated that he reached the scene of accident at 10.15 or 10.20 a. m., found the switch set for the passing track, the lever down, and the open lock in the main-line latch. He stated that either the rear truck of the

fourth car or the front truck of the rear car rested on the switch points. He stated that after the wreckage was cleared away the switch was in proper operating condition. He also stated that he received a message from Operator Newson at Union Point, under date of October 29th, that the lights on the switch involved had been filled on October 24th, nothing having since been done to them. He further stated that he received a message from the operator, dated October 28th, reading as follows:

"Am unable to say what train used the east switch last prior to accident. To the best of my knowledge, it was not used by any train after 7.00 a. m. yesterday."

Chief Law and Special Agent Yarbrough stated that on January 10th there was a similar accident on this railroad at Swords, Ga., and at that time suspicion was placed on a discharged colored employee, who had in his possession a switch key. This man was advised to appear before an officer, but disappeared and has not since been seen. He stated that the switch and switchstand at Swords were of the same make as those at Union Point.

This accident was caused directly by train No. 1 running into an open switch, resulting in the derailment of the train. According to the testimony of the track foreman, no trains used the south passing track between 8.30 a. m. and the time of accident. When westbound extra 57, which arrived at Union Point at 8.22 a. m., passed the switch it was closed, and the evidence is that no employee used the switch between that time and time of the derailment. It is therefore believed that this switch was opened by some unauthorized person with malicious intent.

While Conductor Clary stated that no particular speed was required within yard limits, Rule 93 of the operating rules of this railroad provides in part as follows:

"Trains must approach yard limits under control, and run carefully through the limits, expecting to find the main track occupied."

The investigation developed that Air Brake Inspector Whiteside was riding on the locomotive, he being killed in the accident. He boarded the train at Augusta, having been instructed to attend to some duties on the Athens Division at Union Point. He rode in the coaches as far as Robinson, the last station before reaching the point of accident, where he boarded the locomotive. He was in possession of an annual pass, which was indorsed "Good on Freight Trains and Locomotives," although Master Mechanic Attridge stated, in a

letter to the superintendent of motive power and equipment, that Air Brake Inspector Whiteside had not been instructed, either by him or by any one else in authority, to ride on the locomotive of train No. 1 on the day of the accident. It is possible that his presence on the locomotive caused Engineman Printup to neglect his duties to a certain extent, for had he been fully concerned with the safety of his train he would have brought the speed, which was 35 or 40 miles an hour, under control approaching the yard limit, as required by Rule 3, and would have seen the red switch target in time to stop his train before reaching the switch.

Engineman Printup was employed as a fireman in 1884, was promoted to engineman December 7, 1888, and had a good record. At the time of accident the crew of train No. 1 had been on duty 3 hours and 27 minutes.