No. 179

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

Report of the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances covering the investigation of an accident which occurred on the Georgia Southern & Florida Railway near Cordele, Ga., on January 9, 1914.

September 4, 1914.

On January 9, 1914, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Georgia Southern & Florida Railway which resulted in the death of 2 passengers and the injury of 26 passengers and 2 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

The derailed train was southbound train No. 3, consisting of one baggage car of steel construction, one coach of wooden construction, one coach of steel construction, one Pullman sleeping car and one business car, each of wooden construction, one combination baggage and mail car of steel construction, and one Pullman sleeping car of wooden construction, hauled by locomotive No. 1067, and was in charge of Conductor Brown and Engineman Long. Train No. 3 left Macon, Ga., the last open telegraph station north of the point of derailment and nearly 11.5 miles distant therefrom, at 2:13 a. m., being at that time 2 minutes late, and at about 2:20 a. m. was derailed at a point about 1½ miles north of Cordele while running at a speed estimated to have been about 45 miles per hour.

The locomotive and baggage car remained on the track and came to a stop at a point about 1,200 feet beyond the point of derailment, no damage being done to either part of the train although the rear wheels of the tender and the forward wheels of the rear truck of the baggage car were derailed. The two coaches remained coupled to each other but were derailed on the east side of the track. There is a long trestle at this point, and on reaching this trestle, marks show the derailed wheels were running on the ties east of the rails. This trestle, being weakened by the damage caused by the derailed wheels, sank on the east side and allowed the two coaches to turn on their sides and then to slide along in that position, the wooden coach being badly damaged. The Pullman sleeping car, immediately following the coaches, was also derailed on the east side of the track, went down the embankment, the trucks were torn from the body of the car and it slid along on the ground in an upright position. This car was followed down the embankment by the remaining cars in the train, none of which was materially damaged. Illustration No. 1 is a view looking in a northerly direction. On the extreme right is the overturned steel coach, followed by the sleeping car and business car.

This division of the Georgia Southern & Florida Railway is a

single-track line, and trains are operated by train order and time-card rules, no block signal system being in use. The track is laid with 75-pound steel rails, 30 feet in length, single spiked to untreated pine and cypress ties, no tie plates being used. The ballast is of cinders about 6 or 8 inches in depth. The track is straight for several miles in each direction. Approaching the scene of the accident from the north there is a descending grade averaging about .85%. At the point of derailment the track is on an 8-foot fill between two trestles about 150 feet apart. The trestle, which collapsed under the derailed train, spanned a dry creek and was about 162 feet in length and 8 feet high at its highest point. This trestle was well constructed and maintained, and it seems apparent that its collapse was the result of and not the cause of this derailment. The weather at the time was clear.

Examination of the equipment of the derailed train showed nothing which in any way should have caused the derailment. Examination of the track showed that the first mark of derailment was at a broken rail on the east side of the track at a point about half way between the two trestles; south of this point the track was torn up by the derailment.

The engineman and fireman stated that their first knowledge of anything wrong was when they felt the engine drop toward the left when it was between the two trestles. At the time the engineman thought it was occasioned by a broken rail; he shut off steam and was about to apply the air brakes when they applied of their own accord, this apparently being caused by the air hose parting between the cars.

This accident was caused by a broken rail. Investigation to determine the cause of the failure of this rail was conducted by Mr. James E. Howard, Engineer-Physicist, whose report is attached to the original of this report.