

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD AT ASHKUM, ILL., ON
SEPTEMBER 28, 1931.

October 30, 1931.

To the Commission:

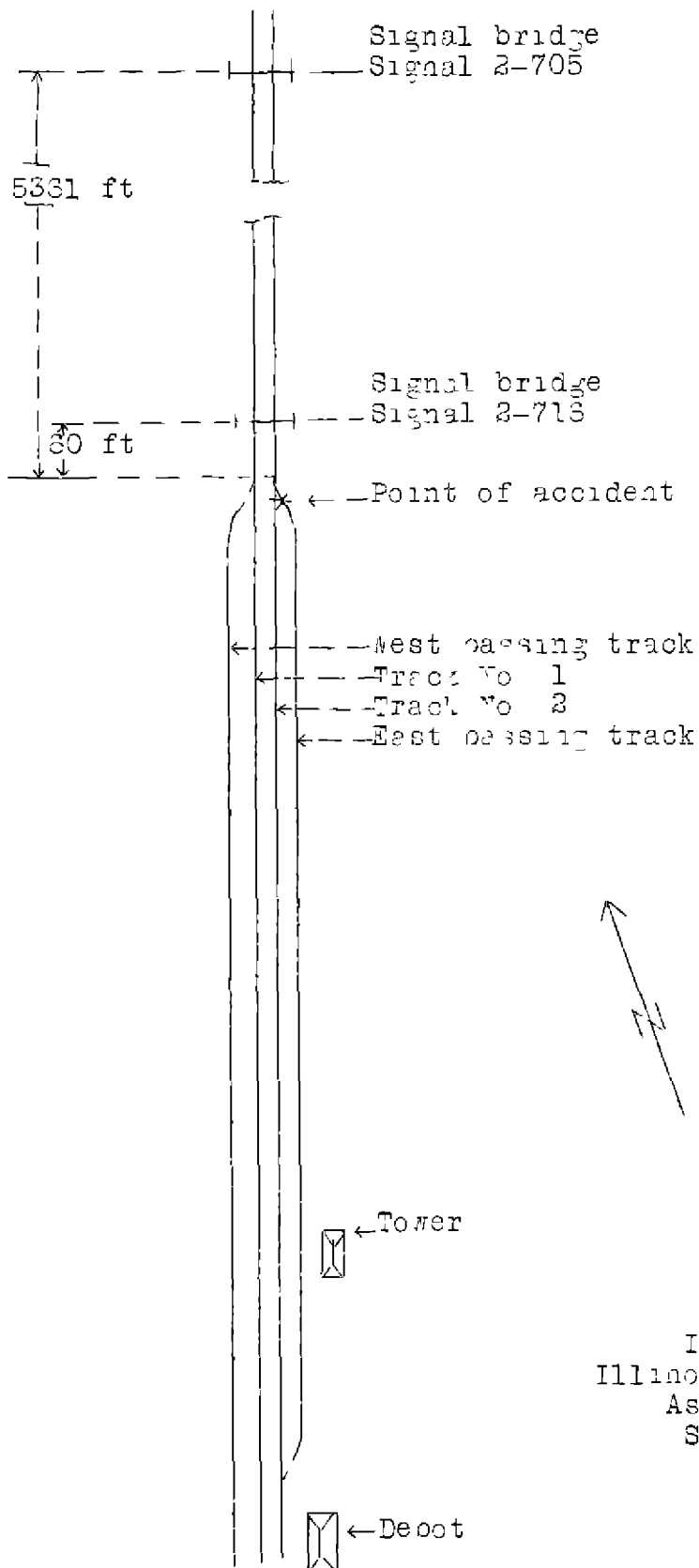
On September 28, 1931, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Illinois Central Railroad at Ashkum, Ill., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and 1 trespasser, and the injury of 12 passengers, 2 persons carried under contract, and 2 employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Chicago District of the Illinois Division, which extends between Chicago and Champaign, Ill., a distance of 127.8 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The tracks are numbered from west to east, 1 and 2, and trains are operated in both directions on each track, the signals being arranged to govern movements of this character. The east passing track at Ashkum parallels the main tracks on the east and at its northern end it leads off of track No. 2 through a No. 10 turnout, it being at this point that the accident occurred. Approaching the point of accident from the north, the main track is tangent for several miles, and the grade is practically level. The speed for all trains is restricted to 15 miles per hour when entering a siding equipped with a No. 10 frog.

The main track is laid with 110-pound rails, 39 feet in length, with an average of 24 ties to the rail-length, and is ballasted with about 12 inches of crushed stone. The east passing track is laid with 90-pound rails, 39 feet in length, and is ballasted with cinders to a depth of approximately 12 inches; both the main track and the passing track are well maintained.

The signals involved are signals 2-716 and 2-705, located 60 and 5,361 feet, respectively, north of the north switch of the passing track; these signals are



Inv No 1725
Illinois Central Railroad
Ashkum, Illinois
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of the color-light, approach-lighting type.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7.08 p.m.

Description

Southbound passenger train No. 35 consisted of one baggage car and one coach, hauled by engine 1133, and was in charge of Conductor Maroney and Engineman Fogerty. The train passed Otto, 12.8 miles north of Ashkum, at 6.52 p.m., according to the train sheet, 27 minutes late, passed signals 2-705 and 2-716, which apparently were displaying an approach and a restricted-speed indication, respectively, and was derailed upon entering the east passing track at Ashkum while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 50 and 60 miles per hour.

All of the equipment was overturned, the engine coming to rest on its left side east of the passing track with its forward end 380 feet south of the switch; the tender was on its right side just behind the engine and across the passing track, the baggage car stopped on its right side almost opposite the tender and to the east of it, and the coach also turned over on its right side but remained on the passing track. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman, and the employees injured were the conductor and the baggageman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Maroney stated that the air brakes were tested before leaving Chicago, the initial terminal, that the train was diverted to track 2 at Kankakee, 17.2 miles north of Ashkum, and that after leaving Kankakee a slow-down was made at Otto and a stop at Chobanase, the brakes working properly at all points en route. Conductor Maroney was riding in the coach while the train was approaching Ashkum, and did not feel an application of the brakes prior to the accident, his first intimation of anything wrong being when the coach suddenly lurched as though it was entering a crossover; he estimated the speed of the train at the time of the accident to have been between 50 and 60 miles per hour. After taking care of the passengers, Conductor Maroney went back and examined the track and noticed a mark which appeared to have been caused by a wheel climbing the west rail

of the passing track. This mark first appeared about 100 feet from the switch and extended on top of the rail for a distance of about 20 feet to where the rail was broken. Conductor Maroney further stated that he saw Engineman Fogerty before the train left Chicago and again saw him at Kankakee, and on both occasions the engineman appeared to be perfectly normal.

Flagman Keyes stated that after the train passed Clifton, 4 miles north of Ashkum, he signalled the engineman by means of the air whistle to stop at Ashkum for the purpose of discharging a passenger and this stop signal was acknowledged by the engine whistle. He could not remember whether the engine whistle was sounded again after that time, as he paid no particular attention to it. He also was unable to state positively whether the brakes were applied before the derailment occurred, but from the motion of the coach, the car in which he was riding, he thought the brakes were applied just before the car overturned. In his opinion the train was traveling at a speed of about 55 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Baggageman Maxwell stated that the last stop was made at Chebanse, 8.8 miles north of Ashkum, and speed was reduced while passing through Clifton, where he threw off bundles of papers. He then began working at his desk and was not aware of anything unusual until he was thrown from his seat by the derailment. He did not hear a station whistle signal sounded while the train was approaching Ashkum and felt no application of the brakes before the baggage car turned over; he judged the speed to be about 50 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Express Messenger McMillan stated that he was engaged in sorting express after the train left Kankakee and had just finished the task and sat down when the car was derailed. He paid no attention to whistle signals en route, as it was not in line with his duty, and did not feel an application of the brakes before the accident occurred.

Operator--Leverman Baugh, who was on duty at Ashkum at the time of the accident, stated that he controls train movements between Otto and Ashkum, and that the switches are operated by a remote control system. Prior to the arrival of train No. 35, he was instructed by the dispatcher to route this train into the east passing track to meet northbound train No. 2, as there was a southbound freight train occupying track 1.

He immediately lined the switches for the movement of train No. 35 over the route directed by the dispatcher, and at that time the train had not yet reached the circuit at Chebanse, a station 8.8 miles north of Ashkum.

Dispatcher Gerbel stated that train No. 35 was diverted from track 1 to track 2 at Kankakee Junction and moved over the latter track to Ashkum. About the time this train passed Otto, 12.8 miles from Ashkum, or about 6.55 p.m., he told the leverman at Ashkum to head the train into the east passing track at that point for the purpose of meeting train No. 2, which was running on track 2 on account of two freight trains using track 1, and upon inquiring later, the leverman at Ashkum informed him that the proper route was lined for train No. 35 immediately after he had been told to do so. Dispatcher Gerbel also said that the handling of trains in this manner at Ashkum was nothing unusual, as trains are operated through the sidings any time the occasion demands, and the arrangement was made to keep from delaying all trains as much as possible.

Elmer Herrold, an employee of the State of Illinois, stated that he witnessed the derailment while driving an automobile on a highway which parallels the railroad tracks on the east. He was traveling at a speed of about 40 miles per hour until the train overtook him and he then increased his speed to 50 miles per hour while the train was passing him, and just as the last car passed his machine the train was derailed. He was on the fireman's side of the engine but did not see any reflection as though the fireman was putting in a fire, neither did he notice any one riding in the engine cab on that side of the engine.

Division Engineer Russell stated that he arrived at the scene of accident about 11.15 p.m. and immediately inspected the track. His examination disclosed that the east passing track switch was set for the siding, with the points fitting properly. He continued his examination southward and found nothing irregular until he reached the ninth and tenth ties south of the switch ties, and at this point he discovered a flange mark on the west ends of the ties, about 8 inches inside the rail; beyond this point the ties were splintered. He could not locate corresponding marks on the east ends of the ties and decided that the engine was then tilted so that only the west wheels were in contact with the ties. He also noticed two light marks on the main track between 5 and 8 feet south of the frog which he thought were caused by some portion of

the equipment being dragged across the track in the course of derailment. The wheel marks on the ties, together with the location of the equipment where it came to rest, led him to believe that the maximum speed of 15 miles per hour for No. 10 turnouts had been exceeded by at least 35 miles per hour.

Master Mechanic Nash stated that he inspected engine 1133 to the best of his ability before it was rerailed, and thoroughly inspected it, as well as the cars, after the equipment was rerailed, but found nothing that could have contributed to the cause of the accident. The brake-valve handle of the engine was in service position, but he thought its position could have been changed while the engine was coming to rest and that it was impossible to determine whether an application of the brakes had been made prior to the accident.

Chief Signal Inspector Buttridge stated that upon his arrival at the scene of accident, about midnight, he examined the switch leading to the east passing track and found it lined and locked for a movement into that track, with no indications that the train had been derailed at the switch. The northbound signal bridge had been destroyed, including all of the relays and circuits controlling movements over the cross-overs. After the wreckage had been cleared away and the signals repaired, he tested them and found that they functioned properly, and discovered no evidence that a false clear indication had been displayed. He described the signals involved as being of the approach-lighting type, and said the distant signal would light when a train reached a point 5,300 feet north of it. This signal would then display an approach indication and the home signal would display a restricted-speed indication, with the switch lined for the passing track. The signals were equipped with electric lights, lighted from either of two sources, one of which is by the alternating current which normally lights the signals while the other is by batteries which are automatically switched on providing the alternating current fails. When a train reaches the distant signal, with the route lined for a through movement, it would require a period of over two minutes for the leverman to change the route.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Fogerty to obey signal indications and have his train under proper control while approaching an open switch.

Under special instructions contained in the timetable, all trains are required to reduce speed to 15 miles per hour before entering a switch equipped with a No. 10 turnout, but the evidence indicated that train No. 35 was traveling at a very much higher rate of speed when it entered the passing track at Asikur. Engineman Fogerty was an experienced man, thoroughly familiar with operating conditions in the locality in which the accident occurred, and when last seen by the conductor he seemed to be in normal condition. The evidence also indicated that the air-brake equipment had been in proper working order, while the communicating whistle-signal sounded by the flagman after the train passed Clifton was acknowledged on the engine whistle, indicating that at that time the engineman was alert and capable of performing his duties. There was an unobstructed view of the signals and tests made of the signal apparatus after it was repaired subsequent to the accident showed that it functioned as intended, and nothing was discovered to indicate that the signals had displayed a false clear indication. Under all these conditions, it is impossible to offer any adequate explanation for the occurrence of this accident, which happened apparently without any attempt on the part of the engineman to apply the brakes before his engine reached the open passing track switch.

Engineman Fogerty entered the service as fireman in 1886 and promoted to engineman in 1890, his record was good. At the time of the accident he had been on duty approximately 3 hours and 35 minutes after an off-duty period of 21 hours and 35 minutes. All of the other employees were experienced men and had not been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BOHLEN D

Director