

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
KANSAS CITY SOUTHERN RAILWAY NEAR FULLER, KANS.,
ON MARCH 27, 1922.

May 1, 1922.

To the Commission:

On March 27, 1922, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Kansas City Southern Railway near Fuller, Kans., resulting in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 1 employee and 1 trespasser.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the First District of the Northern Division, extending between Air Line Junction, Mo., and Pittsburg, Kans., a distance of 124.1 miles, which in the vicinity of the point of accident is 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 within yard limits, about 1 mile south of Fuller, at a switch which leads off the main track to the east to what is known as the Dean Coal Mine spur; approaching this point from the south, beginning 1 mile distant, there are 2,530 feet of tangent, followed by a 30-minute curve to the left 967 feet in length, then 1,783 feet of tangent to the point of accident, north of this point the track is tangent for more than 1 mile. The grade is descending for northbound trains, varying from 0.40 to 0.63 per cent. The track is laid with 85-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with 20 white oak ties to the rail-length, single-spiked, and ballasted with about 12 inches of chats. The switch stand is located on the engineman's side of a northbound train, and the switch is a facing-point switch for northbound trains. The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 9.50 p.m.

Description.

Northbound freight train No. 56 consisted of 51 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 557, and was in charge of Conductor Switzer and Engineman Flynn. This train left North Yard, Pittsburg, 6.9 miles from Fuller, at 9.25 p.m., 1 hour and 15 minutes late, and was derailed at the switch leading to Dean Coal Mine spur while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 25 miles an hour.

The engine came to rest on its left side across the main track, headed east, about 200 feet beyond the point of derailment, while the tender was just south of the engine and headed west. Seventeen cars were derailed and more or less badly damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and head brakeman.

Summary of Evidence.

The evidence indicated that the engine of train No. 56 was working steam at the time the accident occurred; the fireman had just finished putting in a fire, and was about to get on his seat box when he felt the engine leave the rails. The conductor and flagman were in the caboose and their first knowledge of anything wrong was when the accident occurred, although the flagman, who was in the cupola, said he had seen a flash of fire under the head end of the train.

Inspection of the switch and switchstand made shortly after the accident indicated that it had been opened apparently with malicious intent, being lined and latched for the coal mine spur, while the lock was missing. There was oil in the cup, but the lamp was not burning, and the wick had been turned down through the burner. There was also evidence to indicate that after having been opened, the switch had been run through by a southbound train; the east switch point was turned over to the east, and the bridle rods bent upward near the east rail.

The last northbound train was train No. 52, which passed the switch at about 6.30 p.m., and Engineman Stewart, of that train, said that at that time the switch lamp was burning and the switch in apparent good order. Work extra 460 left Fuller for Pittsburg, southbound, less than half an hour before the occurrence of the accident. It passed the switch at a speed estimated by its crew to have been 10 or 12 miles an hour, and none of the members of the crew noticed anything to indicate that their train had run through a switch, while the engine crew, having noticed the reflection of the headlight of train No. 56 approaching in the distance, were giving their attention to getting into clear at Missouri Pacific Crossing, about 1 mile south of the switch, and none of them noticed the position of the switch target or whether or not the lamp was burning.

Careful examination of engine 557 showed all wheels and flanges to be in good condition, and nothing was found which in any way could have contributed to the accident.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by a switch having been opened apparently with malicious intent.

It appeared that in the early part of the evening the switch was in good order with the lamp burning properly, and that afterwards the lock was removed, the switch opened and latched in that position, and the lamp extinguished. It also appeared that the switch had been run through by work extra 460 a few minutes before train No. 56 was derailed.

The yard limits within which this accident occurred embrace the mining district between Oskaloosa, at mile post 113, and mile post 123, the accident occurring at about mile post 122. Under time-table rule 16, within yard limits all except first-class trains will move prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear; rule 27, of the Rules of the Transportation Department, provides that the absence of a signal where one usually is shown must be regarded as a stop signal. Under these rules, Engineman Flynn, of train No. 56, should have regarded the absence of a switch-lamp indication at the coal-mine spur as a stop signal and should not have proceeded without knowing that the main track was clear. Engineman Mahan and Fireman Mead, of work extra 460, also failed to obey these rules; had they obeyed them they would undoubtedly have detected the fact that the switch had been opened, and could have prevented the accident by restoring it to its normal position before proceeding.

All the employees of train No. 56 were experienced men. At the time of the accident they had been on duty less than 2 hours, after having been off duty 14 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Chief, Bureau of Safety.