

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE LAKE ERIE & WESTERN RAILROAD NEAR OAK-
LAND, OHIO ON MAY 16, 1923.

June 18, 1923.

To the Commission:

On May 16, 1923, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Lake Erie & Western Railroad near Oakland, Ohio, which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of eight passengers, one express messenger, one mail clerk, and three employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Sandusky Division which extends between Tipton Yard, Ind., and Sandusky, Ohio, a distance of 210.3 miles. Where this accident occurred this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The point of accident was about 2,100 feet east of the east switch at Oakland. Approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for more than 2 miles, while approaching from the west it is tangent for a distance of about 6,600 feet, followed by a curve of 20° 01' to the left 1,200 feet in length and then 161 feet of tangent to the point of accident. Trees obscure the view across the inside of the curve. The grade is generally descending eastward being 0.57 per cent at the point of accident. It was raining at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2.15 p. m.

Description.

Westbound second-class freight train No. 53 consisted of 12 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 436, and was in charge of Conductor Bates and Engineman Myers. At Coldwater, 4.4 miles from Oakland and the last open office, the crew received a copy of train order No. 56, Form 19, providing for a meet with train No. 2 at Oakland, which is an intermediate station between two block stations. Train No. 53 left Coldwater at 2.04 p. m., according to the train sheet, 3 hours and 30 minutes late, and was nearing Oakland when train No. 2 was seen to be approaching and, according to the statements of the crew, train No. 53 had been brought to a stop when it was struck by train No. 2.

Eastbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of one baggage car, one combination car and one coach, all of wooden construction, hauled by engine 4156, and was in charge of Conductor Rowe and Engineman Bassler. At Fort Recovery, 4.8 miles from Oakland and the last open office, the crew received a copy of train order No. 56, previously referred to, also written on Form 19. Train No. 2 left Fort Recovery at 3.05 p. m., 14 minutes late, passed Oakland without stopping and collided with train No. 53 while traveling at a speed estimated at 45 miles an hour.

Both engines remained upright, with their front ends badly damaged, while the head end of the first car in train No. 2 was demolished, as was the 8th car in train No. 53. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 2.

Summary of evidence.

Engineman Myers, of train No. 53, said the speed of his train was about 20 or 35 miles an hour when he saw train No. 2 approaching the east switch, traveling at a high rate of speed. At first he thought it was going to pull by and back in, but when it passed the switch, still traveling at a high rate of speed, he shut off steam and applied the air brakes in emergency. Engineman Myers further stated that he did not hear any whistle signals sounded by the engineman of train No. 2, and was unable to say definitely whether the engine hauling that train was working steam. Fireman Benner and Head Brakeman Gress were riding on the left side of the engine and could not see train No. 2 on account of the curve, their attention being first attracted by the application of the air brakes made by Engineman Myers.

Fireman Early, of train No. 2, said he received the order from the operator at Fort Recovery and read it to the engineman, who looked at it but did not read it aloud and then placed it in his pocket. Fireman Early did not remember whether the whistle was sounded approaching Oakland, and said the train was beyond the east switch, with the engine working steam, when he realized its location and saw train No. 53 immediately ahead; he said he then called to the engineman to shut off steam and jumped. Fireman Early further stated that he thought the engineman read the order at Fort Recovery, also that he acted as if his mind was on something else, not paying any attention to the water or steam. The engineman had the window closed and was sitting on his seat box; Fireman Early could not say definitely where his hand was but thought it might have been on the brake valve; he said, however, that the engineman made no movement of any kind or any effort to stop the train.

Conductor Rowe, of train No. 2, said that at Fort Recovery he received one copy of the order to meet train No. 53 at Oakland, the agent giving the engineman's copy of the order to the fireman. As the train approached Victoria, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Oakland, the mail clerk gave the engineman a stop signal on the air whistle. The train then proceeded toward Oakland and Conductor Rowe and Brakeman Darby, both of whom were riding in the rear car, said they did not hear Engineman Bassler sound the meeting-point whistle signal. Under the rules, if this signal is not sounded the conductor is required to "take immediate action to stop the train." There are no buildings at Oakland, there being only a passing track, telephone booth at the west switch, and a station signboard nearly 1,000 feet from the west switch, and Conductor Rowe said he did not realize that the train had passed Oakland until it rounded the curve immediately west of the point of accident. He said he had the meeting point in mind and that it was negligence on his part in not obeying the order. Brakeman Darby was talking with another employee who was deadheading and did not know his train had passed Oakland until after the accident. Both of these employees said that they had not noticed the engineman shut off steam or apply the air brakes prior to the accident, neither had they noticed any thing unusual in the actions of Engineman Bassler, although Conductor Rowe said the Engineman's face was badly swollen, so much so that his eyes were scarcely visible. The employee with whom Brakeman Darby was talking also said that he did not feel any application of the air brakes prior to the accident.

While all of the testimony indicates that Engineman Bassler had received a copy of the order to meet train No. 53 at Oakland, it could not be definitely established that he had read or understood the order correctly. The rules permit the use of a train order on Form 19 to restrict the rights of a train and it is not required that conductors personally deliver Form 19 orders to their enginemen.

There is considerable question as to Engineman Bassler's physical condition after making the stop at Victoria. Apparently no road-crossing whistle signals were sounded, or a meeting-point whistle signal when approaching Oakland, and it also appears that Engineman Bassler did not shut off steam or apply the air brakes, before the accident occurred, neither did he call a warning to the fireman, nor make any movement just prior to the accident. The records showed that Engineman Bassler had been under the care of a physician in April, and a statement obtained from the physician was

to the effect that he was suffering from facial erysipelas, but he considered he was in good condition otherwise and that his general health was unimpaired. Engineer Bassler's body was so badly mutilated in the accident that by subsequent examination it could not be determined whether he died previous to the accident or was killed as a result thereof.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the crew of train No. 3 failing to obey a train order establishing a meeting point with an opposing train.

It is impossible to assign any definite reason for the failure of Engineer Bassler to obey the order. Fireman Early, who was an inexperienced employee, was attending to his fire and did not notice the location of his train until it had passed the meeting point. The conductor and brakeman were apparently paying no attention whatever to the operation of their train, and for their negligence there can be no excuse.

With the exception of the fireman of train No. 2, all of the employees involved were experienced men. The crew of train No. 3 had been on duty about 3½ hours after being off duty for about 20 hours; the crew of train No. 53 had been on duty 6½ hours after about 13 hours off duty.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.