

December 12, 1912.

In re Investigation of Accident on the Lehigh Valley Railroad, at Hometown's Ferry, Pa., on October 27th, 1912.

On October 27th, there was a rear end collision between two freight trains on the Lehigh Valley Railroad, at Hometown's Ferry, Pa., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one trespasser.

After investigation I beg to submit the following report:

At Hometown's Ferry the Lehigh Valley Railroad is a double track line running east and west along the northern bank of the Susquehanna river, the grade being practically level. The collision occurred almost opposite the station at Hometown's Ferry, on a forty-minute curve.

On this line trains are operated under the block system, and a home automatic block signal of the two-arm, lower quadrant, semaphore type is located 1122 feet east of the point where the accident occurred. A distant signal of the disk type is located about one mile east of the home signal.

West-bound freight train extra 1687, symbol train XV-1, left Packerston, Pa., at 12:35 a.m., on the date of the accident, with Conductor Gallagher and Engineer Douglass in charge, the train consisting of an engine and 24 loaded cars.

This train stopped for water and to make some repairs to the engine at Falls, Pa., and while it was there west-bound freight train extra 1686, symbol train Advance JS-1, consisting of an engine and 26 cars, with Conductor O'Donovan and Engineman Pierce in charge, came up and was flagged by Flagman Bollinger of extra 1687. Extra 1687 arrived at Laceyville, 30 miles west of Falls, at 5:57 a.m., and stopped for water. Here a hot journal/^{box} on the fifth car from the rear was discovered and the journal box was repacked. This train was also overtaken at Laceyville by extra 1686. Extra 1687 left Laceyville at 5:57 a.m. Shortly afterwards Conductor Gallagher found that the journal was again hot, and he decided to set out the car at Donet's Ferry, a station 15 miles west of Laceyville. There was a dense fog, and knowing that the engineman would be unable to see a signal from the caboose, Conductor Gallagher applied the brakes from the rear end of the train. As the train slowed down Flagman Bollinger dropped off and started back to protect the train.

When the train came to a stop just west of the station, the Conductor went forward to set out the car with the hot journal. This car was about opposite the entrance to the side-track, and in order to place it on the siding it was necessary to back the train a short distance. The head trainman, who had been riding on the engine, started toward the rear end of the train to find out the reason for the stop, and when he came within speaking distance the conductor informed

him of what had occurred and told him to signal the engineman to back up. The train was backed a short distance and the conductor was about to make the cut when the collision occurred. Conductor Gallagher stated that about six minutes elapsed between the time when the train first stopped at Homet's Ferry and the time when the collision occurred. Conductor Gallagher stated that he noticed that the steam was shut off as 1636 approached, and he heard a short blast of the whistle just before the collision occurred.

Flagman Bollinger stated that after the conductor had applied the brakes he dropped off, at 6:30 a.m. by his watch, before the train stopped, and started back to flag, carrying torpedoes and one red and one white lantern. He stated that on account of the dense fog he was unable to see extra 1636 and on account of the noise from an east-bound freight train which was passing he did not hear the approaching train. He stated that when he dropped off from the caboose he started to run back in the middle of the track, and when he reached a point about opposite the home signal he saw extra 1636 only a short distance away and rapidly approaching. He stated he did not have time to place torpedoes on the rail, but he swung his lantern and jumped to one side of the track. He did not see the engineman and his signal was not acknowledged. As the engine passed him, Flagman Bollinger threw his white lantern up in front of the engine, as he saw the door fly open. He stated that the home signal indicated stop. Engineman

Pierce of extra 1686 did not recognize or heed this signal.

The collision occurred at about 6:35 a.m. Engine 1686 was overturned, and the caboose of extra 1687 and several cars in trains extras 1687, 1686 and 743 east, which was passing at the time of the collision, as well as a car which stood on a station siding, were destroyed by the collision and by a fire which followed.

Engineman Pierce of extra 1686 was pinned in the wreckage for about 3 hours. Engineman Dougher stated that after the collision occurred he went back and endeavored to extricate Engineman Pierce, and talked with him under the engine for about 1.0 hours. He stated that engineman Pierce said he had fallen asleep just before the collision. Conductor O'Donovan estimated the speed of extra 1686 at 25 to 30 miles per hour. The Conductor and Flagman of this train stated that after leaving Laceyville they heard engineman Pierce give the whistle signal for a highway crossing about 1-3/4 miles east of the point where the accident occurred, but they noticed no reduction in speed and felt no application of the brakes until just before the collision, when they thought the engineman shut off steam.

Head Trainman Birmingham of extra 1686 rode in the engine on the left side of the cab from Laceyville to Honet's Ferry. He stated that the distant signal was at caution and the home signal just east of Honet's Ferry was at danger. He stated that engineman Pierce did not recognize either of these signals, and he made no effort to ascertain the reason

therefor. He stated that he saw Flagman in the middle of the track just opposite the home signal, and he called to the engineman; the Engineman shut off steam and applied the brakes after passing the flagman but was able only to reduce the speed from about 35 miles an hour to between 20 and 30 miles an hour when the collision occurred.

The engine hauling extra No. 1686 was of the Hetherhubbard type and the fireman on this type of engine cannot communicate with the engineman without going from the rear of the engine to the engineman's cab, which is nearly up to the front end of the locomotive. (Some locomotives of this type are equipped with speaking tubes). Fireman Blank of extra 1686 stated he saw the first signal after leaving Laceyville and it was clear. He stated that he did not look for other signals as he was busy with his fire until the collision occurred. He stated that engineman Pierce sounded the whistle for the highway one mile east of Hemet's Ferry and that the Engineman shut off steam just before the collision occurred, but he did not notice any application of the brakes.

None of the employees involved in this accident was on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law. Engineman Pierce had been on duty 7 hours and 20 minutes, after a period off duty of 41 hours and 15 minutes.

This accident was caused by the failure of engineman Pierce of extra 1686 to observe and obey the indications of the automatic signals, and to his failure to obey rule 517,

requiring that "in foggy or stormy weather, when signals cannot be seen plainly, the signals must be approached cautiously so that engineers and trainmen can see and interpret them correctly, always bearing in mind that safety is of greater importance than making time." Engineman Pierce stated himself that he had fallen asleep.

The accident might have been averted in spite of Engineman Pierce's dereliction of duty had Head Trainman Birmingham properly performed his duty. A proper regard for the safe operation of the train should have prompted Trainman Birmingham to call Engineman Pierce's attention to the caution and stop signals which he passed without recognizing, and had he communicated with Engineman Pierce when he passed the caution signal he might have aroused him in time to avert the accident.

The evidence indicates that Flagman Bollinger had gone back only about as far as the home signal, 1122 feet from where the collision occurred. According to Conductor Gallagher's statement, six minutes elapsed between the time when the train came to a stop and the time when the collision occurred. If Flagman Bollinger had gone back as far as he might have gone in this period of time before extra 1686 passed him, and used torpedoes as required by the rules, he might have aroused the Engineman in time to avert the collision.

This accident again calls attention to the necessity for the use of some automatic train control device that will

intervene to prevent an accident of this character when an
Engineer fails to perform his duty properly.