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CHIEF
IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE LEHIGH VALLEY RAILROAD, NEAR VAN ETTEN JUNC-
TION, N. Y., ON MAY 31, 1920.

July 15, 1920.

On the morning of May 31, 1920, there was a derailment of a freight train, and a side collision between a passenger train on an adjoining track and the derailed freight train, on the Lehigh Valley Railroad near Van Etten Junction, N. Y., which resulted in the death of 1 passenger and 2 employees, and the injury of 38 passengers. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on the Ithaca Branch of the Seneca Division, a single-track line extending between Van Etten Junction and Geneva Junction, N. Y., a distance of 59.5 miles. Trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred about 3,120 feet west of Van Etten tower. Approaching the point of accident from the west, the grade is slightly ascending; the track is tangent for about one-half mile, followed by a 2-degree curve to the left approximately 400 feet in length. The accident occurred near the east end of this curve. At the time of the accident the weather was clear.

The freight train was made up in Van Etten yard on a track known as Swamp Siding, which parallels the Ithaca Branch main track. This track is tangent for nearly its entire length, approximately 2,200 feet. At the west end of this siding there is a switch which diverts trains toward the Ithaca Branch when set

to lead to the left, and to the Elmira and Cortland Branch, Auburn Division, when set to lead to the right; it was set in the latter position at the time of the accident. At a point 13.4 feet east of this switch there is a switch leading to the Van Etten yard tracks at which the derailment occurred.

Westbound freight train extra 1155, en route from Van Etten to Cortland, N. Y., consisted of engines 1155 and 1162, 34 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Mack and Enginemen Hutchinson and Shevlin; this train started to pull out of Swamp Siding between 12:15 a. m. and 12:20 a. m., and had proceeded about 12 car lengths, attaining a speed of 4 or 5 miles an hour, when the rear brake beam of front tender truck of engine 1155 came down and the hanger became wedged between the guard rail and stock rail, just east of switch leading to the Van Etten yard tracks. The wheels of the rear tender truck of engine 1155 and engine truck and driving wheels of engine 1162 were derailed as they passed over the brake hanger, so that when the wheels on the right side of the tender and engine came into contact with the transfer rail of the yard switch the rear end of the tender of engine 1155 and the front end of engine 1162 were thrown over to the left, projecting out far enough to obstruct the main track of the Ithaca Branch, at a point 336 feet east of automatic signal I-2872.

Eastbound passenger train No. 6, en route from Buffalo, N. Y., to New York, N. Y., consisted of 3 coaches, 1 club car, and 4 Pullman sleeping cars in the order named, hauled by engine

2059, with Conductor Arner and Engineman Laux in charge. This train left Ithaca, the last open telegraph office, at 11.43 p. m., on time, and at about 12.16 a. m., while running at a speed estimated to have been 50 miles an hour, collided with the derailed portion of extra 1155.

Train No. 6 struck the cistern of the tender of engine 1155 about 5 feet from the rear end, the engine, the first four cars, and the front trucks of the fifth car being derailed and diverted toward the right or south side of the track. Engine 2059 remained on the ties for a distance of 150 feet after being derailed and then began to leave the track and ran about 200 feet before it came to rest on its right side clear of the right of way. The tender swung around at right angles to the boiler and came to rest against the boiler head. The smoking car followed the engine and came to rest with the front end buried nearly to the roof in the muck land, while the rear end rested upon the track in an upright position. The second coach came to rest with the front end resting on the track near the first coach and the rear end was swung towards the swamp, forming a "V" with the first coach; the forward end of the second coach also struck the fifth car from the head end of extra 1155. The third coach came to rest with the forward end in the swamp and the rear end resting on the track. The fourth car remained upright on the track. The engineman and fireman of train No. 6 were killed.

Shortly after starting Extra 1155, Engineman Hutchinson's attention was called to the fact that the tender was derailed by

his fireman and the head brakeman, and also by the engineman of engine 1162 calling for brakes. He immediately applied the brakes in emergency; he then looked back and noticed engine 1162 was leaning over. At about the same time train No. 6 struck his train, which was practically stopped at the time of the collision.

Fireman Reeves, of engine 1155, jumped off the engine as soon as he had called to the engineman that the tender was derailed, but train No. 6 was too close to be flagged before the collision occurred.

Engineman Shevlin of engine 1162, felt his engine riding on the ties, applied the straight air brake, sounded the whistle signal for brakes, called to his fireman and then jumped off; he thought train No. 6 collided with his train before he jumped.

From the evidence and an examination of the various parts of the brake rigging found after the derailment, it is believed a pin came out of the top end of the left hanger for the rear brake beam of the forward tender truck of engine 1155, allowing the hanger to fall down and become wedged between the guard rail and stock rail of the switch leading from Van Etten yard to Swamp Siding. While the construction of the tender truck affords a view of the brake hanger pins, keys, and lugs, which are cast on the under side of the bolster, they are located back of the side frames of the truck, so it would be an easy matter to overlook a missing key, especially at night, or in making a hurried inspection of the equipment. This derailment occurred at the time train No. 6 was approaching the point of accident, and there was no opportunity

for either train crew to take any action to prevent train No. 6 from striking the derailed engines.

This accident was caused by fallen brake rigging becoming wedged in a guard rail, resulting in the derailment of the freight train, and a passenger train on an adjoining parallel track colliding with the derailed engines and cars of the freight train.

All of the employees involved in this accident were men of experience, with good records, and none of them was on duty in violation of the hours of service law.