

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD AT  
SECO, KY., ON SEPTEMBER 20, 1917.

October 19, 1917

On September 20, 1917, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a runaway engine on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad at Seco, Ky., which resulted in the death of 3 passengers and 1 employee, and the injury of 39 passengers. After investigation the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

This part of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad is a single-track line over which trains are operated by train orders transmitted by telephone, there being no block signal system in use.

Southbound passenger train No. 1 consisted of 1 combination baggage and mail car and 3 coaches, all of wooden construction, hauled by locomotive 365, and was in charge of Conductor Dean and Engineman Gilson. It was en route from Lexington to McRoberts, Ky., passed Whiteside, 11.2 miles from Seco, at 3.47 p.m., left Seco and had proceeded about 550 feet from that station when it was struck by engine 1022 at about 4.17 p.m.

Locomotive No. 1022 was standing at Neon, Ky., 1-1/2 miles south of Seco and was being coaled by two negro laborers when it ran away, pushed a car of coal ahead of it, and collided with train No. 1 while running at a speed of about 35 or 40 miles an hour.

The fireman of train No. 1 was caught in the gangway of the engine and instantly killed. The first coach in train No. 1 was telescoped by the baggage and mail car ahead of it and destroyed. The coal car in front of locomotive 1022 was destroyed, and both tenders were damaged. The weather at the time was clear and the sun was shining.

From Neon to Seco, a distance of one and one-half miles, the track is on a descending grade and there are several curves. Just before reaching Seco from Neon there is a sharp curve to the left which obstructs the views of approaching engines, the accident occurring on this curve.

Engineman Gilson of train No. 1 stated that his train had left the station at Seco and had proceeded a short distance when he saw engine 1022 and the coal car coming around the curve about 200 feet away, at a speed of 35 or 40 miles an hour. He had only sufficient time to shut off steam, apply the air brakes in emergency and jump before the collision occurred. He said he could not see engine 1022 sooner on account of the curve and the cut through which the track was laid.

Conductor Dean of train No. 1 stated that he was riding in the car immediately behind the mail and baggage car, the front part of this car being used for colored passengers, when his train left Deco, and the speed of his train was about five or six miles an hour when the brakes were applied in emergency. He stated that he jumped out of the window and the collision occurred immediately thereafter at about 4.17 p.m. He said the mail and baggage car telescoped the coach in which he was riding nearly its entire length.

Hostler Foreman Dale said that he instructed Shop Laborer LeMaster to back engine 1022 down to the coal bins and have the negro coal shovelers pick up the coal lying on the ground and coal the engine, and look out for everything until he got back. He stated that he then went to the yard office for the expense bills, and shortly thereafter heard the engine start and saw it moving. He stated that he had issued instructions that negro laborers should not handle or operate an engine, and that he had given these instructions to Will Taylor, one of the negro coal shovelers, several times, the last time being about a week prior to the accident.

Shop Laborer LeMaster stated that he backed engine 1022 down to the coal bins, and told the two negro shovelers to pick up the loose coal on the ground there and coal the engine with it. He said that he closed the throttle tightly, placed the reverse lever on center, opened the cylinder cocks, and then walked to the yard office, and had just reached there when he heard engine 1022 start. He stated that Taylor had tried to handle engines when he was first employed but was forbidden to do so by Mr. Dale and himself.

Conductor Hart stated that he was in the telephone booth at the north end of Neon yards when he heard engine 1022 coming, saw it strike a car of coal and run through a couple of switches at a speed of about 30 miles an hour, but he did not see anyone on that engine when it passed him. He uncoupled the engine from his train, and after notifying the dispatcher that engine 1022 was running away, followed that engine as fast as he could. He said that the instructions were that no negroes should be allowed to handle an engine.

Car Repairer Webb stated that he was in the yards at Neon, and heard the exhaust from engine 1022, and thought the throttle had come open. He said that he saw a colored man in the cab, and after the engine started he saw one of the negro coal shovelers, Will Taylor, running after it, but has not seen him since.

Car Inspector Hall said that he heard engine 1022 start, and saw a negro run to the front side of the engine cab, put his head out of the window and then disappear from view. He did not know who the negro was, but was told afterwards that it was Will Taylor.

Benny Toler stated that he was shoveling sand in the yards at Heon, heard the exhaust of locomotive 1022, and upon looking up saw the negro, Will Taylor, in the cab. He did not see him leave the cab, but shortly after the engine started he saw him running.

Otis Parker stated he was employed as a fire knocker at Heon and saw the two negroes, Whitehurst and Taylor, coaling locomotive 1022. He heard the engine start, saw Will Taylor looking out of the cab window and saw him get off on the fireman's side of the engine. He said that Taylor ran after the engine for some distance and then turned to the left and he has not seen him since.

Crew Caller Marks stated that he saw Will Taylor get on engine 1022, saw the engine start, and it moved about two car lengths before he jumped off and ran after it.

Garfield Whitehurst, one of the negroes coaling engine 1022, stated that Taylor and he were shoveling coal from off the ground near the coal bin onto engine 1022 when Taylor got upon the engine for the purpose of moving it back. Whitehurst said that he remonstrated with him, saying it was contrary to instructions given by Mr. Dale, but Taylor started the engine and after it had moved down to the third switch he jumped off and ran after it. He said that Taylor and he had been instructed by Mr. Dale not to attempt to handle engines, and that their duties were to shovel coal.

This accident was caused by locomotive 1022 being moved by an inexperienced and irresponsible negro, Will Taylor.

On March 17, 1916, bulletin No. 29 was issued for the information of all employees, reading as follows:

"Hereafter all employees, except regularly employed doctlers and authorized helpers, are forbidden to handle any engine or engines. In cases where the Foremen find it necessary to have extra help they will assign some competent employe to do the extra work."

The evidence of all of the employees was to the effect that none of the negro laborers were authorized to move engines in any way. The negro responsible for this accident had been specifically warned that he would not be permitted to move engines and that under no circumstances must he do

so. Since the accident he has disappeared and his whereabouts are unknown.

Contributing in a large measure to this accident was the failure of Shop Laborer Lancaster to remain with the engine while it was being cooled and look after it, as instructed by Hostler Foreman Dale, and had he obeyed these instructions and remained with the engine the accident would not have occurred.

J. S. T.