

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROAD AT CARPENTER, MICH.,
ON SEPTEMBER 18, 1927

October 28, 1927.

To the Commission:

On September 18, 1927, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Michigan Central Railroad at Carpenter, Mich., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of three employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Detroit-Bay City Branch of the Detroit Division, which extends between Detroit and Bay City, Mich., a distance of 107.3 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred on the siding at Carpenter at a point approximately 300 feet north of the south switch; this siding parallels the main track on the east. Approaching the south switch of this siding from the south the track is tangent for a distance of 1,913.9 feet, this tangent continuing north of the switch for a distance of about 1,300 feet. The grade at the point of accident is level. The south switch has a No. 10 turnout and is equipped with an Ajax switch stand 8 feet in height located on the engineer's side of a northbound train.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 9.18 a. m.

Description

Southbound freight train extra 7826 consisted of 32 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 7826, and was in charge of Conductor Koehn and Engineman Purdy. This train arrived at Carpenter at 8.54 a. m., entered the siding at the north switch and came to a stop near the south switch at 8.58 a. m. While standing at this point, with the brakes applied, it was struck by northbound passenger train No. 203.

Northbound passenger train No. 203 consisted of one express car, one baggage car, two coaches, one combination baggage and passenger car, one coach, one Pullman parlor car and one Pullman sleeping car, in the order named, hauled by engine 8468, and was in charge of Conductor Person and Engineman Russell. The first and fifth cars were of steel-underframe construction, the balance of the equipment being of all-steel construction; the first four cars were being handled as deadhead equipment. This train passed Lapeer Junction, the last open office, 5.69 miles south of Carpenter, at 9.06 a. m., one minute late. After performing some work at Lapeer, 0.54 mile north of Lapeer Junction, it departed from that point about four minutes late, entered the south switch of the passing track at Carpenter and collided with extra 7826 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 60 miles per hour.

Engine 7826 and its tender were derailed and came to rest on their left sides east of the siding; the first car in the train of extra 7826 was demolished. The engine, the first five cars and the forward truck of the sixth car in train No. 203 were derailed; the engine was badly damaged, as was also the case with the fourth car and the head end of the fifth car, while the first three cars were practically demolished. The employee killed was the baggageman, who was riding in the fifth car.

Summary of evidence

Head Brakeman Huebler, of extra 7826, stated that after the train had stopped on the siding he accompanied the engineman to a telephone booth, located about midway between the two switches, and after remaining at that point a few minutes he and the engineman joined the conductor and flagman and assisted them in fastening a car door. After this had been done the engineman started towards the engine and the conductor instructed Brakeman Huebler to accompany the engineman and to comply with the latter's orders. While the engineman was moving the head end of the train for the purpose of clearing a highway crossing Brakeman Huebler proceeded to the south switch and unlocked it but did not notice its position. He then sat down on a tie but when he heard train No. 203 approaching he arose and was leaning against the switch stand when he noticed the engineman of his own train making rapid motions with his hand in a horizontal direction. He walked away from the switch stand a distance of 3 or 4 feet but the engineman continued giving the same signals, which caused him to become confused and as he had not previously observed the position of the switch he thought he was being signaled to throw the switch to keep the opposing train from colliding with his own train. He then threw the switch, with the result that he opened it

when train No. 203 was only 75 or 100 feet distant. Brakeman Huebler further stated that this was his second trip as a brakeman after having made several trial trips, that he had been furnished with a book of rules and time-table but had not had an opportunity of studying the rules, and that on the trial trips he had received instructions concerning the handling of switches but that he did not recall the rule requiring employees to take a position at least 20 feet from a switch when a train is approaching, which rule also requires the employee to stand on the opposite side of the track from the switch stand when practicable.

Engineman Purdy, of extra 7826, stated that after reporting the train as clear of the main track and then assisting in fastening the car door, he went forward to where his engine was standing, the head brakeman following some distance behind. When he reached the engine he moved the forward end of the train for the purpose of cutting a highway crossing. After recoupling his train as train No. 203 was approaching he was surprised to see the head brakeman standing at the switch stand, with his back towards the opposing train, and Engineman Purdy said he at once shouted to the brakeman and gave him hand signals which were intended as instructions to get farther away from the switch. Brakeman Huebler immediately turned around, however, and opened the switch when the approaching train was only a short distance from it, traveling at a speed of 55 or 60 miles per hour. Engineman Purdy further stated that he had had no conversation with the head brakeman from the time he got off his engine to communicate with the dispatcher until after the accident had occurred, he was aware that the brakeman was an inexperienced employee but said he had had no occasion to instruct him as to his duties other than to tell him to open a switch when it was necessary to do so.

The statements of Fireman Opdyke, of extra 7826, generally coincided with those of Engineman Purdy, while the statements of Conductor Koehn and Flagman Lewis, of the same train, were of no importance as they did not know what was transpiring at the head end of their train prior to the accident. The testimony of both Conductor Person and Flagman Schram, of train No. 203, disclosed nothing of value, except that they estimated the speed of their train at approximately 60 miles per hour at the time of the accident; they were unaware of anything unusual until the collision occurred. The statements of the engine crew of train No. 203 were not obtained, they being confined in the hospital at the time of the investigation and it appearing that no additional facts of importance would be developed.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by an open switch, for which Brakeman Huebler was responsible.

Brakeman Huebler had made several trial trips as a student brakeman and was making his second trip as a regular brakeman. He had a book of rules and a time-table, but stated that he had not had an opportunity to read the rules and was not familiar with them. He had unlocked the switch but had not opened it, and when he saw the engineman giving him hand signals as train No. 203 was approaching at a high rate of speed he became confused and thought it was necessary to operate the switch in order to prevent an accident, resulting in his opening the switch directly in front of the approaching train.

All of the employees involved, except Brakeman Huebler, were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director