

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILWAY AT CLAYTON, LA., ON FEBRUARY 3, 1920.

March 16, 1920.

On February 3, 1920, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Missouri Pacific Railway at Clayton, La., which resulted in the death of 5 passengers, and 2 employees, and the injury of 6 passengers and 2 employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows.

The Felsenthal District of the Louisiana Division of the Missouri Pacific Railway, on which this accident occurred, is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. The accident occurred at Bridge No. 48, which spans the Little Tensas River and which is located about 900 feet north of the station at Clayton. The track is straight for the entire 900 feet between the station and the bridge, while the grade is .25 percent ascending up to within about 150 feet of the south end of the bridge, from this point to and across the bridge the grade is level.

Bridge No. 48 is of the deck girder type, having a total length of 450 feet, at each end there are two fixed spans 75 feet in length and in the center there is a draw span 150 feet in length which is pivoted in the center and operated manually from the center pier. There is no framework on the bridge which projects above the level of the track, the rails were about 10 feet above the water, which was about 38 feet deep at the time of the accident. The bridge is protected by a caution board located 2,530 feet south of the bridge and a stop board located 435 feet south of the bridge. These signals are of the seraphore type having stationary arms attached to the posts. The bridge is also protected by two large bullseye lamps on the center pier which display green lights when the draw span is closed and red when open. When the draw span is to be opened a red flag is also displayed at each end of the bridge in frames about 14 inches square on staffs about 4 feet high. These staffs are driven into the ground about 10 inches outside the rail, 250 feet from the draw span. The weather was cloudy and slightly misty.

Northbound passenger train No. 806, in charge of Conductor Brown and Engineman Taylor, consisted of engine 8657, 1 baggage car, 1 combination mail car and coach, and 2 coaches, in the order named, all of the cars being of wooden construction. This train left Vidalia, La., the district terminal, at 6.05 a.m., 20 minutes late and arrived at Clayton at about 7.03 a.m., coming to a stop with the pilot of the engine approximately 773 feet south of the draw span of bridge No. 48. After doing station work the train left Clayton at about 7.04 a.m., 16 minutes late and at about 7.05 a.m., while running at a speed estimated at from 6 to 15 miles an hour, it ran off of the

bridge, into the south channel of the open draw, the draw having been opened at about 7.00 a.m. to allow the steamboat F. D. Norwood to pass through the north channel.

The engine and first two cars fell into the river; the engine landed upright on the bottom of the river bed and was badly damaged, the baggage car landed between the engine and the center pier and was demolished, while the combination car landed on the opposite side of the engine and was so badly damaged that it was afterwards destroyed. The engine and both cars came to rest approximately parallel to each other and at right angles to the track. With the exception of the first pair of wheels of the first coach, the two rear cars of the train were not derailed or damaged. The passengers killed were riding in the combination car; the employees killed were the fireman and the baggage and express messenger.

Engineman Taylor, of train No. 806, stated that on the morning of February 3d it had been raining, but that when he arrived at Clayton the rain had stopped, although it was still cloudy and a little foggy, and difficult to see clearly. After starting from the station at Clayton he noticed that the lubricator on the engine was not feeding properly, reached down for an oil can, found very little oil in it, noticed another oil can by his feet and reached to pick it up, intending to give it to the fireman to fill the lubricator. In the meantime he had looked out the front window of the cab and had seen a number of men standing by a water tank near the south approach to the bridge, just as the engine reached the tank, which is located about 100 feet from the south end of the bridge, he looked up again and saw that the draw span of the bridge was open. He estimated the speed at the time at about 15 miles an hour and stated that he made every effort to stop the train. He did not see any lights on the center pier of the bridge or any red flag at the south approach to the bridge; neither did he see the boat that was passing through the north channel until too late to avoid the accident. In his opinion the bridge should be protected by torpedoes. Engineman Taylor also stated that he had found the bridge open only once or twice before, the last time being two or three months previously.

Conductor Brown stated that on the morning of the accident the air brakes were tested at Vidalia, as well as at one point en route, and were working properly. Upon arrival at Clayton he alighted from the train to assist passengers in getting off and on, but was not in a position to see the signals protecting the bridge on account of the station platform being filled with people and also on account of a truck filled with baggage obstructing his view. When the train left Clayton he boarded the front end of the last car and walked to the rear. His first intimation of anything wrong was a sudden stopping of the car, presumably due to the air brakes being applied in emergency. He thought the speed at the time was about 10 or 15 miles an hour. After Engineman Taylor had been rescued, the conductor

heard him say that upon leaving Clayton he got off his seatbox and went to the tank valve to see how much water he had, and then returned to his seat, picked up an oil can to fill the lubricator and found the can nearly empty, that he then picked up another oil can and called to the fireman to put the oil in one can and that just at that moment the fireman jumped off his seatbox and the engine fell into the river. Conductor Brown further stated that he was familiar with time-table rule Q-22, requiring trains to approach drawbridges under full control and to stop 200 feet before reaching the bridge unless a signal is received from the bridge tender indicating that the bridge is closed. He stated that Engineman Taylor had been complying with this rule, also that he was considered to be one of the most conservative enginemen in the service

Rear Brakeman Hobson stated that at Clayton he assisted passengers in getting on and off, but on account of the large number of people on the platform and a truck loaded with baggage, he was unable to see ahead sufficiently to notice that the drawbridge was open or to see the signals protecting the bridge. Leaving Clayton he boarded the rear end of the train and was putting out the marker lights when he heard the engine whistle sounded followed by the crash of the derailment

Train Auditor Box stated that he was in the combination car at the time of the accident and fell into the water with the car. He estimated the speed at the time at about 6 miles an hour. He said that he did not see the signals displayed for the protection of the bridge and did not know that the bridge was open.

Roadmaster Hinkley, who was riding on train No. 806 at the time of the derailment, stated that he saw the steamboat a minute or two after the accident occurred and it was then about abreast the track. He did not notice any lights on the boat but he thought the pilot house of the boat extended 10 or 12 feet above the railroad tracks and the smoke stack extended higher than that

Fireman Marks stated that while he was not on train No. 806 on the morning of the accident, he had known Engineman Taylor for about 11 years and has acted as fireman for him more or less during the last six years. He said that in approaching the Tensas River bridge, Engineman Taylor always made a stop at the Clayton station and when starting again always sounded the whistle for the bridge, keeping the speed of his train down to about 4 miles an hour until he received a proceed signal from the bridge tender. If the bridge tender were not on duty, Engineman Taylor always made sure that the bridge was closed before passing upon it

Bridge Watchman Loomis, on duty at Clayton, stated that at 6.45 a.m. on the morning of the accident the steamboat

F. D. Norwood whistled for the bridge to be opened and he immediately placed red flags about 250 feet each side of the draw span, and opened the bridge at about 7.00 a.m. The signal lamps on the center pier were burning brightly at the time. At about 7.05 a.m., from his position on the draw span, he saw train No. 806 arrive at the station at Clayton, the headlight of the engine was shut off at the station and a minute or two later the train proceeded, ran over the flag which he had placed at the south end of the bridge, and fell into the river. He said that he, as well as some men who were on the south end of the bridge shouted and made every effort to attract the engine crew's attention to the danger, but neither the engineman nor the fireman were on their seatboxes and the engine was still working steam when the accident occurred. He said that it is the practice of enginemen approaching the bridge to slow down until he gives them a signal to proceed and if he is not in sight the enginemen bring their trains to a stop and wait. Bridge Watchman Loomis further stated that during the month of November, 1919, he had occasion to open the bridge 13 times, in December 25 times, in January 18 times and during the first three days of February he had opened it 3 times.

C. R. Stevens, who was assisting Bridge Watchman Loomis on the morning of the accident, stated that he saw the engine knock down the red flag which had been placed south of the bridge by the bridge watchman and that the speed of the train did not decrease at any time between the station and the point where it went into the river. He also said that the weather was cloudy, but that he could see the train approaching from Clayton Junction, which is located 1.18 miles south of Clayton.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Taylor to keep a proper watch of the track ahead and to observe that the drawbridge had been opened.

Had he kept a proper lookout ahead there was no reason why he could not have seen the open drawbridge while the train was standing at the station, nor was there any reason why he could not have seen the boat passing through the opening in the bridge or the signals displayed indicating that the bridge was open, which signals consisted of a red flag 250 feet south of the bridge and red lights on the draw span. The fact that Engineman Taylor was not looking ahead was substantiated by the testimony of witnesses who testified that the engine was working steam up to the time of the accident. According to the engineman's statements, it is evident that he allowed his attention to become occupied with his lubricator for a period of time longer than he should at any time while his train was in motion, approaching the drawbridge he should not have allowed his attention to be diverted at all from his paramount duty of seeing and knowing that the bridge was safe for the passing of his train.

Rule 98 of the Missouri Pacific Railway Company reads as follows

"Trains must approach the end of double track, junctions, railroad crossings at grade, and drawbridges, prepared to stop, unless the switches and signals are right and the track is clear. Before crossing the track of a railroad, or entering thereon, and before crossing any drawbridge, except where an interlocking system or other system of signals covered by special rules are in use, every engine must be brought to a stop at a distance not less than 200 nor more than 800 feet from such crossing or drawbridge, and must not proceed until the crossing whistle (as provided in rule 14-b) has been given and track plainly seen to be clear. Where required by law, trains must stop."

In making the stop at Clayton station, the pilot of the engine stood approximately 775 feet from the draw span and therefore Engineman Taylor complied with this rule as far as the stopping of the train was concerned, but the rules states that enginemen must not proceed until the track is seen to be clear and this provision obviously he failed to observe. Rule 98, however, has been superseded by time-table rule Q-22, which reads in part

"All trains must approach draw-bridges and railroad crossings at grade under full control

"At interlocked draw-bridges and crossings, interlocking rules will govern.

"At draw-bridges and at railroad crossings not interlocked, trains unless otherwise directed will make full stop 200 feet from clearance point and must not proceed until signalled to do so by Watchman or Flagman."

Engineman Taylor failed absolutely to comply with the provisions of this rule.

Engineman Taylor entered the service of the Missouri Pacific Railway Company as engineman in October, 1904. His record was clear with the exception of a 15 days' record suspension for failure to see that the engine had a supply of water before leaving Vidalia on June 20, 1916.

At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 806 had been on duty about 1 hour and 35 minutes, after off-duty periods sufficient to comply with the provisions of the Hours of Service Law.