

HTB-AJB

November 29, 1911.

MEMORANDUM TO COMMISSIONER McCHORD
relative to accident on the Missouri Pacific Ry., October 15, 1911.

Draft submitted by the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances as a basis for the report of the Commission.

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On October 15th, 1911, at 8:46 A. M., a head-on collision occurred on the Missouri Pacific Railway near Fort Creek, Neb., between north-bound passenger train No. 105 and south-bound extra fast freight train No. 407. This accident was not reported to this office by telegraph until October 17th, the message having been sent from Kansas City, Mo., at 8:49 P. M., the 16th. On the morning of the 16th, press reports furnished information as to the magnitude of the accident, and Inspectors Jones and Starbird were instructed to make an investigation. They at once proceeded to the scene of the accident, and after procuring all available information, attended the Coroner's inquest and assisted in the examination of witnesses. The following is a synopsis of their report:

The Missouri Pacific Railway uses the double tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad from South Omaha to Gilmore Junction, a distance of about 5 miles, and its own single track line from Gilmore Junction south.

Passenger train No. 105, consisting of Missouri Pacific engine No. 7707, one baggage car, one combination mail and passenger car, one day coach, one chair car, and one Pullman sleeper, left Kansas City, Mo., for Omaha, Neb., at 12:01 A. M.,

October 15, 1911, about one hour late. At Union, a station 30 miles from South Omaha, the crew of this train received order No. 15, reading as follows:

"No. 105, Engine 7707, will run late as follows; leave: Murray 8:16 am, Wynard 8:23 am, Plattsmouth 8:30 am, LaPlatte 8:40 am, Gilmore Jct. 8:50 am."

The train then proceeded toward Omaha, being about one hour and thirty minutes late at the time of the accident.

Freight train extra No. 407, in charge of Conductor Gross and Engineman Crawford, and consisting of Missouri Pacific engine No. 407, fourteen loaded and three empty cars, with a caboose, left the yard at Nicholas Street, Omaha, Neb., at 7:30 A. M. Before starting, this train received order No. 19, reading as follows:

"Engine 407 run extra Omaha to South Omaha with right over No. 155."

On arrival at South Omaha, at about 8:05 A. M., four loaded cars were picked up and both the conductor and engineman went to the yard office to check the register book and to ascertain if all superior trains had arrived. Prior to checking the register, they received train order No. 28, reading as follows:

"Engine 407 will run extra South Omaha to Falls City yard. Will meet extra West 2393 at Union and Extra west 7710 via Talmage at Nebraska City Jct."

Extra 407 left South Omaha about 8:35 A. M., passed Gilmore Junction, no block signal system being in use, and proceeded south upon the single track, colliding with passenger train No. 105 at 8:48 A. M., near Fort Creek station, about one and one-half miles south of Gilmore Junction, causing the death of

seven persons and injuries to twenty-nine others, one of whom has since died. The impact of the collision derailed and demolished both of the locomotives; the day coach was telescoped two-thirds of its length by the combination car, which was practically destroyed, while the baggage car had one end badly damaged.

The accident occurred on a curve of about three degrees, which prevented the engineman of the passenger train from seeing the freight train in time to avert the collision, he being on the outside of the curve, while his fireman was engaged in firing at the time. Consequently, the freight train was not discovered until the passenger train was within a few car lengths of it, and no opportunity was afforded of checking the speed of the passenger train, which was probably more than 40 miles per hour. The engineman of the freight train, however, was on the inside of the curve, and saw the passenger train in time to bring his train almost to a stop.

The office of the yard master of the Missouri Pacific Railway in South Omaha is located about 400 yards from the Union Pacific passenger depot. In this office is kept the train register book previously mentioned, in which is supposed to be recorded the time of the arrival and departure of all trains at South Omaha. Freight train conductors are required by the rules to register their trains in person, and both they and their enginemen are required to check this register book and ascertain if superior trains have arrived and departed before starting out from the yard on their trips. Passenger train conductors

are not required to register. The operator at this yard office registers the passenger trains himself, receiving information relative to their arrival in the following manner:- When a Missouri Pacific passenger train passes Gilmore Junction, the towerman at that place, who is in the employ of the Union Pacific Railroad, notifies the Union Pacific dispatcher at Omaha, by telephone, that the train has passed. The Union Pacific dispatcher then notifies the Missouri Pacific dispatcher at Falls City, Neb., a distance of about 100 miles. The Missouri Pacific dispatcher, upon receipt of this information, issues a train order to the operator in the yard office at South Omaha, who is located about 93 miles from Falls City, to register the passenger train as having arrived at South Omaha at a certain time.

This method of maintaining a train register, where information must pass by telephone through one office, then by telegraph through two other offices, affords opportunities for mistakes to occur and should be discontinued, especially in view of the statement of Conductor Gross that he often had to call up the dispatcher in order to know if trains were in, and had been told to go out into the yard and look for them. A proper regard for safety in train operation would seem to require the maintaining of a train register at Gilmore Junction, where conductors should be required to register in person or by written slip or ticket, so that a proper record might be kept.

Missouri Pacific Train Dispatcher Lane, located at

Wells City, stated that he sent to the operator at South Omaha a message addressed to Conductor Gross, reading as follows:

*Conductor Gross, 407. No. 105 should pass
Gilmore Junction about 8:50 am with no signals. W.F.K.*

Both the operator at South Omaha and Conductor Gross claim they did not receive this message. Had this message, or had train order No. 15, been in the possession of Conductor Gross, in charge of extra No. 407, the accident would undoubtedly have been averted.

Conductor Gross checked the register and claims he thought No. 105 had arrived, but admits that he might have mistaken No. 155, which was on the register, for No. 105, which was not on the register; or that he might have checked the wrong date. Although required by the rules to do so, the engineer did not check the register, accepting the conductor's word for it that all superior trains had arrived.

The weather was cloudy and there was no fog. The employees involved had had sufficient time off duty and had not been on duty in excess of the statutory period.

This accident was caused by the failure of the conductor and engineer in charge of freight extra No. 407 to obey and be governed by the rule requiring them to check the train register at South Omaha and to know that superior trains had arrived. Both were experienced men, and there is no excuse for this negligence.

As a preventive of accidents of this character, it

is recommended that an adequate train register book be maintained at Gilmore Junction.

It is further recommended that a block signal system be installed.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Inspector of
Safety Appliances.