

INTERSTATE ~~COMMERCE~~ COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD AT LAKE VIEW, ARK., ON
JANUARY 27, 1928.

March 23, 1928

To the Commission:

On January 27, 1928, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Lake View, Ark., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Latour District of the Memphis Division, extending between McGeehee and Lexa, Ark., a distance of 82.50 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this 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 a point 1,424 feet south of Lake View station; approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of almost 3 miles, followed by a 1° curve to the right 5,155 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 3,330 feet from its southern end, the grade is practically level. The track is laid with 85-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with 20 ties to the rail-length, single-spiked, partly tie-plated, and ballasted with gravel to a depth of 6 inches. The track is maintained in fair condition.

The passing track at Lake View parallels the main track on the west, the south switch being located 87 feet north of the point of accident, which in turn was just north of a cattle guard adjacent to a public highway crossing. The wing fence at the location of the cattle guard was constructed of 1½ x 6 inch pine lumber and weighed approximately 100 pounds.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 2 p.m.

Description

Northbound freight train third No. 360 consisted of 71 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1260, and was in charge of Conductor Barnett and Engineman Wheeler.

This train left Elaine, the last open office, 7 29 miles south of Lake View, at 1.42 p.m., 4 hours and 12 minutes late, and was travelling at a speed estimated to have been about 18 miles per hour when it was derailed at Lake View, upon encountering the wing fence of a cattle guard which had been blown upon the track

The engine was derailed to the left and followed along the rails until it reached the south passing-track switch where its course was diverted to the left along the passing-track finally coming to rest on its left side at a point 265 feet from where the first wheel climbed the rail, with its forward end 41 5 feet west of the main track. The tender cistern was torn from its frame and came to rest on its right side diagonally across the main and passing tracks, nearly opposite the front end of the engine. The first seven cars in the train were scattered in various positions between the switch and the tender cistern, while the forward truck of the eighth car was also derailed. The employee killed was the fireman.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Wheeler stated that the speed of his train was not over 18 miles per hour, due to the high wind which was blowing at the time, and that his first intimation of anything wrong was when the engine reached a point about 50 feet south of the passing-track switch, at which time it appeared to him that the trailer truck was derailed, he immediately shut off steam and applied the air brakes in emergency, and shouted a warning to the fireman, who was standing in the gangway of the engine. Engineman Wheeler had a train order instructing him to look for obstructions in that vicinity and he said he was strictly complying with those instructions and that he did not see anything on the track, although the air was quite full of dust, while smoke and steam blowing across the track resulted in his being able to see only 50 feet ahead of the engine. Engineman Wheeler was also watching in order to ascertain the position of the train-order signal at Lake View station as soon as it came into view, but he said this did not interfere particularly with his observance of the track ahead of his train. After the accident he examined the engine but found no evidence of anything wrong. Upon examining the track, however, he found marks on the ties near the cattle guard and also noticed a cattle-guard wing fence lying on the

fireman's side of the track, a corner of which was cut off and one plank lying between the rails. Engineman Wheeler felt certain that this wing fence was not on the track as the train approached, or at least while the point at which it was found was within his range of vision.

Head Brakeman Allmond, who was riding in the brakeman's cabin on the tender, stated that from his position he could not see ahead, and that after the occurrence of the accident he did not make an examination to determine its cause. His estimate as to the speed of the train agreed with that of the engineman. Brakeman Allmond further stated that the wind was blowing hard, but that he did not know whether its velocity was great enough to tear the cattle-guard wing from its fastenings.

Conductor Barnett stated that his first knowledge of the accident was when he felt the air brakes apply and upon looking out a window of the caboose he saw the engine turn over and several cars pile up. While proceeding to the scene he noticed that the west wing of the cattle-guard was missing but in his haste he made no attempt to locate it, he did not see the missing wing until some time after the accident, it then being at the station. He examined the track and noticed flange marks on the ball of the rail which first appeared near the cattle-guard and which extended to a point about $1\frac{1}{2}$ rail-lengths south of the switch before the wheels dropped off the rail and ran along on the ties. Conductor Barnett also stated that the wind was blowing very hard, interfering with the speed of the train, and that there was considerable dust in the air, and he was of the opinion that under the conditions prevailing at the time the engineman could not have seen the cattle-guard wing lying on the track for any great distance.

The statements of Middle Brakeman Hardy, who was riding in the cabin of the tender, and of Flagman Walker, who was riding in the caboose, were of no particular importance, they having received no warning of anything unusual until the occurrence of the accident.

Trainmaster Murphy, who was also riding in the caboose at the time of the accident, stated that immediately after the accident he proceeded to the forward end of the train and inquired of the engineman if he had any idea as to the cause of the accident, the engineman replying that he had none. Trainmaster Murphy estimated the speed of the train at the time of the accident at 18 miles per hour, and said that it was being delayed considerably

by the wind. About three hours after the accident he made a careful examination of the track and found a wing of the cattle guard lying on the track on the fireman's side, part of which was located on the outside of the rails, and the balance between the rails, apparently having been cut in two. He also noticed a flange mark on the left rail. In his opinion the wind, which was blowing from the left side of the track, was strong enough to have blown the fence across the track.

Section Foreman Freeman, whose section is located south of the point of accident, stated that on the day of the accident he left Lake View at 7 a m , and passed the cattle guard on the way to his section. At that time the cattle guard appeared to be in good condition, although he did not make a close examination of it. After his arrival at the scene of the accident he found part of a cattle-guard wing lying about 6 feet from the track, with some splinters in between the rails. He decided that the accident was caused by the cattle-guard wing having been on the track but said he did not think the wind was strong enough to have torn the wing from its fastenings, basing his opinion on the fact that had such been the case the wing on the opposite side of the track would also have been blown down.

Section Foreman Wilkerson, on whose section the accident occurred, stated that at about 11.30 a m , on the day prior to the accident he found this same cattle-guard wing torn from its moorings and lying alongside the track, undamaged. It was replaced with the assistance of a laborer and was fastened with staples and barbed wire; since no nails were available it was not nailed to the wing post, but he considered it as securely fastened as though it had been nailed. On reaching the scene after the occurrence of the accident he found a portion of the wing fence between the rails with the balance lying on one side of the track. He also found flange marks on the ball of one of the rails and after completing his investigation he concluded that the presence of the cattle-guard wing on the track was the cause of the accident. According to the statements of Section Foreman Wilkerson, about 50 to 100 people pass along the track daily from the station to the highway beyond the cattle guard, and while he had never seen anyone tear down a wing, he assured this to have been the case in this instance, he did not think it could have been torn down by the wind.

Section Laborer Banks corroborated the statements of Section Foreman Wilkerson as to the condition of the cattle guard in question on the day prior to the accident, and he said he was of the impression that the repairs which were made had resulted in its being securely fastened.

Roadmaster Lunsford stated that he averages three trips per week over this district and had inspected the track in the vicinity of the point of accident on January 24. He considered the track to be in good condition for the maximum speed so far as line and surface were concerned although there were some slight variations in gauge and cross-levels. After making an examination of the track on the day following the accident he noticed the flange mark on the left rail, beginning about where the cattle-guard wing had been lying on the track, and decided that the accident was caused by the cattle-guard wing, he thought it must have been torn loose by some one, as he did not think it could have been blown loose by the wind.

The statements of Division Engineer Smith and Assistant Engineer Wagner, both of whom made an examination of the track subsequent to the accident, were to the effect that the accident was caused by the cattle-guard wing having been on the track, and they thought it had been torn from its fastenings by some source other than the wind that was blowing at the time of the accident.

Special Agent Graham endeavored to ascertain whether the wing had been tampered with but at the time of this investigation he had not found anything to indicate that this was the case. He also found that there were some people working in the vicinity during the day of the accident, but that none of them had observed anybody tampering with the cattle guard. His theory was that the wing was not securely fastened, resulting in its being blown over by the wind, or else that some one pulled it loose for the purpose of getting past, then leaned it back against its support, and later the wind blew it on the track.

A careful inspection of the track and also of the engine failed to reveal anything that could have caused or contributed to the occurrence of the accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the wing fence of a cattle guard that was lying on the track.

There was a high wind blowing at the time of the accident but there was a difference of opinion as to

whether the wind was of sufficient velocity to have torn this wing fence from its fastenings. On the other hand, Section Foreman Wilkerson stated that on the day prior to the accident he had found this wing torn loose and out of position and that he had placed it back into position and securely fastened it, these statements were substantiated by Section Laborer Banks. That it was in proper position on the morning of the day of the accident was shown by the statements of Section Foreman Freeman. The fact that this wing had been torn down the day before the accident would indicate that possibly some person tore it loose and either threw it on the track or left it in such a position that it was later blown on the track by the wind. Engineman Wheeler said he was keeping a careful lookout for obstructions, but the evidence indicated that there was considerable dust in the air, and when combined with the smoke and steam from the engine it is entirely possible the conditions were such that the wing fence could have been on the track without being observed by the engineman.

The employees involved 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.