

Inv. 897
October 23, 1915.

**IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILWAY NEAR PLATTSMOUTH, NEBRASKA,
SEPTEMBER 24, 1915.**

On September 24, 1915, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Missouri Pacific Railway near Plattsmouth, Neb., resulting in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 7 passengers and 4 persons carried under contract. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

The Omaha district of the Missouri Pacific Railway, upon which this accident occurred, extends from Omaha to Falls City Yard, Neb., a distance of 93.83 miles. 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. The point where this accident occurred is on the single track line. Trains are operated by train orders and time-table rights, and a permissive manual block signal system is in operation. When trains, either by time-table or train order, are to meet or pass at an intermediate siding, a block signal caution card is issued to each train. The rules require that when a train has arrived at an intermediate siding to be met or passed by a superior train, as soon as it is clear of the main line the conductor must notify the block station at each end of the block by telephone that his train is clear of the main line and the block is then considered clear as far as the train at the intermediate siding is concerned, and it is not necessary to issue block signal caution cards to

either following or opposing trains to permit them to enter the block section.

This investigation developed that on the date of the accident, freight train No. 153 arrived at La Platte, an intermediate station, about five hours late on its time-card rights against train No. 104, and when the main track was clear reported that fact to the operator at the block offices at Gilmore Junction on the west, and Plattsmouth on the east, thus clearing the block between these stations.

Eastbound passenger train No. 104, en route from Omaha, Neb., to Kansas City, Mo., consisted of locomotive 5504, 1 baggage car, 1 combination mail car and coach, 1 coach, 1 cafe and chair car, and 1 Pullman sleeping car, in the order named, and was in charge of Conductor Hulse and Engineman Sherlock. The baggage car and combination car were of wooden construction, with anti-telescoping ends, while the coach, cafe and chair car, and sleeper had steel underframes. This train left Omaha at 8:00 a.m., on time, after having received a copy of train order No. 22, which read as follows:

"No. 104, Eng. 5504 meet 153 Eng. 1274 at La Platte."

At, Gilmore Junction, the last telegraph station before the point of collision, the crew in charge received a clearance card, informing them that they would meet train No. 153 at La Platte as directed by train order No. 22. Train No. 104 departed from Gilmore Junction at 8:28 a.m., three minutes late. On arrival at La Platte, 8 miles east of Gilmore Junction, they found train

No. 155 on the siding. Although the crew noticed that the engine hauling this train was No. 1273 instead of No. 1274, they assumed that an error had been made in the engine number in train order No. 22, and that the train on the siding was train No. 153. Train No. 104 did not stop at La Platte, but proceeded on its way eastward and at 8:45 a.m., collided with westbound freight train No. 153 at a point about 2.4 miles east of La Platte, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 30 miles an hour.

Westbound freight train No. 153, consisting of locomotive 1274, 32 loaded cars and a caboose, was in charge of Conductor Webster and Engineman Reed. It left Falls City, Neb., en route to Omaha, at 4:00 a.m., 45 minutes late. At Murray, 69.6 miles west of Falls City, the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 22, quoted above. Train No. 153 departed from Murray at 8:20 a.m., passed Plattsmouth, the last open telegraph station before the point of collision, 7.5 miles west of Murray, at 8:38 a.m., 45 minutes late and at 8:45 a.m., collided with train No. 104, about 2.2 miles west of Plattsmouth, while running at a speed of about 12 miles an hour.

Leaving La Platte station, eastbound, the main track of the Missouri Pacific Railway is paralleled by a main track of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company. About, 3,500 feet south of La Platte, these tracks cross the Platte River and, beginning at a point about 200 feet from the north side of the river, the tracks of both companies are straight for over one mile, at which point the Missouri Pacific Railway crosses the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. There is an interlocking tower

located at this crossing known as Greopolis Tower. The Missouri Pacific track continues straight for 600 feet south of this tower, at which point there is a 1-degree 19-minute curve to the left about 2,900 feet in length. The collision occurred about the middle of this curve. On account of a thick growth of trees on the inside of this curve, the vision of the engineman of train No. 104 was limited to about 425 feet. The grade at this point is about 1 per cent ascending for eastbound trains.

Approaching from the south and beginning at a point about 1-1/2 miles north of Plattsmouth station, the track is straight for about 1,200 feet, followed by a 2-degree curve to the left for about 1,295 feet; there is then about 800 feet of straight track, which in turn is followed by the 1-degree 19-minute curve on which this accident occurred. The view of the engineman of train No. 133 was good up to the point where it was obstructed by the grove of trees on the east side of the track. He could also see the track north of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy crossing from a distance of 1-1/2 miles by looking across the country. At the time of the accident the weather was cloudy.

As a result of the collision, engine 5504, of train No. 104, was very badly damaged, the baggage car was completely demolished and the front end of the combination car slightly damaged. The other cars in this train were not materially damaged. Engine 1274 and the first four cars of train No. 133 were derailed and badly damaged; the next four cars were not derailed; the following three, however, were derailed and damaged; the remaining cars of the train remained on the track.

Conductor Webster, of train No. 153, stated that he received a copy of train order No. 22 at Murray, naming La Platte as the meeting point with train No. 104. At Plattsmouth he received a clearance card and block signal caution card, notifying him that train No. 153 was in the block and also that his train was to meet train No. 104 at La Platte as directed by train order No. 22. He stated that after leaving Plattsmouth he was riding in the cupola of the caboose and that he saw the smoke of train No. 104 when that train was about at the Burlington Railroad crossing, but at that time thought it was a Burlington train. He stated that when he again saw train No. 104, it was 5 or 7 telegraph poles away. He thought it would stop and watched it until the trains were almost together. He also stated that he was watching the air gauge in the caboose which indicated that his engineman had made an emergency application of the air brakes, and that there was nothing he could have done to prevent the collision. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the collision to be 10 miles an hour.

Engineman Reed of train No. 153 stated that he saw the smoke of train No. 104 just after it had crossed the Platte River bridge. He thought it was a train on the Burlington Railroad, and did not know differently until it appeared around the curve from behind the grove of trees. He then applied the brakes in emergency, opened the sanders and jumped from his engine just before the collision occurred. He stated that the engine on train No. 104 was working steam at the time of the collision.

Fireman Wyatt, of train No. 153, stated that approach-

ing the scene of the accident he was riding on his seat box and on account of being on the inside of the curve, did not see train No. 104 at all. He stated that Engineman Reed made an emergency application of the air brakes and yelled to him to jump, which he did without waiting to see what was happening. He estimated the speed to be about 12 or 14 miles an hour.

Brakeman Thomas, of train No. 153, stated that he was riding in the cupola of the caboose, with the conductor, and noticed train No. 104 when it was about at Greopolis Tower, at which time the conductor said to him, "There must be a Burlington train." Shortly afterward he said it was on the Missouri Pacific tracks. He watched the trains as they came together and stated that the engine of train No. 104 was working steam at the time of the collision.

Conductor Hulse, of train No. 104, stated that upon leaving Omaha, he received a copy of train order No. 22 directing his train to meet train No. 153, engine 1274, at La Platte. At Gilmore Junction he received a clearance card and block signal caution card, confirming train order No. 22. He stated that approaching La Platte the brakeman signalled the engineman by the signal cord as required by the rules, to call the engineman's attention to the meeting point and that the engineman answered this signal. He stated that at La Platte he noticed a train standing on the siding with engine 1273, and supposed that it was train No. 153. He thought that an error had been made in the train order regarding the engine number. As La Platte is a flag station and as no one wanted to get on or off, his train did not stop. He

stated that he was riding in the front end of the coach at the time and was watching ahead, and that he saw his fireman nod to the conductor of train No. 155, and then wave his hand to him; when the coach in which he was riding passed the caboose of the train on the siding, he yelled to the conductor of the freight train and held up three fingers, intending to indicate "153" and he understood the conductor's reply to be in the affirmative. Conductor Hulse further stated that shortly afterwards, Brakeman Hatfield of his train came to him and told him that the engine number of the train on the siding did not correspond with that in the train order, but that he too understood from the freight conductor's signs that the train at La Platte was train No. 153. Conductor Hulse also stated that he often received train orders with the wrong engine number, but that as a general rule, they are corrected by another train order, although in some cases this is impossible. He could not name a single instance, however, when the wrong number on a train order had not been corrected. Conductor Hulse stated that at the time there was no question in his mind but that the train on the siding was train No. 153, as he did not remember ever having met train No. 155 at La Platte. He further stated that there was no application of the air brakes prior to the collision and that he did not think the engineman of his train saw train No. 153.

Flagman Hatfield, of train No. 104, stated that approaching La Platte, he was riding in the rear end of the chair car, and that he gave the engineman a signal, reminding him of the meeting point with train No. 153, as required by the rule and that

the engineman answered his signal by sounding the whistle. He stated that he noticed that the engine of the train on the siding at La Platte was No. 1273 instead of 1274, the number named in the train order, and started forward to the coach to tell the conductor that it was the wrong number. When he passed the caboose of the other train, he was down on the steps of the chair car and the conductor of the freight train was standing on the caboose steps; he called out "125" to him, and the conductor threw his hands up in the air as if confused, Flagman Hatfield stating that he took this gesture as an affirmative reply. He then went to Conductor Hulse in the day coach and laid the train order down on the seat in front of him, telling him that it was the wrong engine number. He stated that the conductor replied that he heard somebody there say something to the engineman as he went by and that he guessed it was all right. He further stated that he made no effort to stop the train--that he was working under the conductor's direction and that he did not consider it altogether his duty to stop the train after notifying him about the engine number. Flagman Hatfield stated that his train was running about 30 miles an hour or a little faster at the time of the collision, and that the air brakes were applied just before the collision occurred.

Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Towerman Hase, at Oreo-polis interlocker, stated that signals for the crossing had been set at clear for train No. 104 about two minutes, when he noticed train No. 133 approaching about one-fourth mile east of northbound distant signal and he ran for the levers, intending to change the

line-up to allow train No. 153 to proceed, when he discover No. 104 going under the home signal; he started to throw the signal against No. 104, but realized that the engine was too far beyond the signal to enable the engineman to see it. He stated that he then ran out on the steps and gave stop signals with his hand with the expectation that some of the trainmen on train No. 104 would notice him and apply the air brakes. He saw the collision and estimated the speed of train No. 104 at 30 miles an hour and the speed of train No. 153 at about 10 miles an hour.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of train No. 104 to obey an order fixing the meeting point with their train and train No. 153 at La Platte.

For the purpose of identifying trains with certainty, the engine numbers of trains are designated in train orders by this railroad and there can be no excuse for such dereliction of duty by the crew of train No. 104, as is evidenced in this case.

The employees in charge of train No. 104 were competent men of long experience. Conductor Hulse entered the service in the year 1886 as a conductor and Engineman Sherlock entered the service as an engineman in the year 1888. At the time of the accident they had been on duty only 45 minutes.