INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURED ON THE MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD AT WARNOCK, ILL., ON JUNE 14, 1926.

July 20, 1926.

To the Commission:

On June 14, 1926, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Warnock, Ill., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occured on the Chester District of the Illinois Division, extending between North Junction, Ill., and St. Louis, Mo., a distance of 127.27 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occured between the switches of the passing track at Warnock, on the northbound main track, at a point 1,503 feet north of the south passing-track switch; the passing-track is 3,998 feet in length and is located between the main tracks. Approaching from the south the track is tangent and practically level for several miles, this tangent extending for a considerable distance beyond the point of accident.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occured at about 9.05 p.m.

Description

Northbound freight train extra 1238 consisted of 68 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1238, and was in charge of Conductor Eckels and Engineman Redding. This train departed from Gorham, its initial terminal, 69.04 miles south of Warnock, at 9.30 a.m., with a bad order refrigerator car, A.R.L. 14272, coupled behind the caboose, the coupler being out of the south end of the car. The train passed Prairie du Rocher, 26.56 miles south of Warnock and the last open office at 5 p.m. On arrival at Warnock it was brought to a stop, at about 9 p.m., for the purpose of picking up cars, the cars in question were not ready to be moved, however, and the train immediately proceeded, but after having moved about 8 or 10 car-lengths was again brought to a stop on account of an

overheated journal on a car near the engine, at about which time the rear end of the train was struck by extra 1533.

Northbound freight train extra 1533, consisted of 125 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1533, and was in charge of Conductor Briggs and Engineman Speckins. This train left Prairie du Rocher at 7.57 p.m., and collided with the rear end of extra 1238 at Warnock while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles an hour.

Refrigerator car A.R.L. 14272, the caboose, and the car ahead of the caboose in extra 1238, were derailed; the caboose was telescoped its entire length by the refrigerator car. Engine 1533, its tender, and three cars in this train were derailed, the engine remained upright but the cars were demolished. The employee killed was the conductor of extra 1238,

Summary of evidence

Flagman C. E. Griffith, of extra 1238, stated that while occupying the passing track at Valmeyer, 7.36 miles south of Warnock, the caboose markers, as well as the cupola light, were properly lighted and displayed. Conductor Eckels gave him the usual instructions to ride the engine to Warnock and assist other brakemen in performing work at that point, and also to tell Engineman Redding to pull out of the passing track at a very low rate of speed, so that the conductor could with safety place redlights on the rear end of the bad-order car as required by the rules, and take down the markers on the caboose. Flagman Griffith proceeded to the engine and informed Engineman Redding accordingly, and the engineman complied with the instructions, pulling out of the passing track at Valmeyer at a speed of about 5 miles an hour. On rounding the curve located just north of Valmeyer, Flagman Griffith looked back from the engine and saw the cupola light, but did not observe the markers on the caboose; while passing through Fountain, located 2.41 miles from Warnock, he saw the headlight of the following train, extra 1533. On coming to a stop at Warnock it was ascertained that the cars intended to be picked up at this point were not ready and the train immediately proceeded. Flagman Griffith then observed a car with an overheated journal, about the tenth of twelfth car from the engine, consequently the train was again brought to a stop, after having moved about 8 or 10 car-lengths, about which time the accident occured. Flagman Griffith thoroughly understood that when a car is hauled behind the caboose, such as was done in this instance, it is required that the markers be removed from the caboose and red lights then displayed from

the rear end of the car behind the caboose, and he said that about two months previously Conductor Eckels had instructed him to this effect; Flagman Griffith said he did not place red lights on the rear end of the refrigerator car before proceeding to the engine at Valmeyer, or turn the cupola light, as the train was then standing on the passing track, and Conductor Eckels had said he would attend to the displaying of the lights at the rear end. Flagman Griffith further stated that there were three lighted red lights inside the caboose with the handles on them bent in such a manner as to be suspended from the grab irons; also that there was a complete supply of flagging equipment in the caboose, including torpedoes, fusees, flags and lanterns. The statements of Engineman Redding, Fireman Goodwin and Brakeman Talley and J. W. Griffith, of extra 1238, corroborated in substance those of Flagman C. E. Griffith. Brakeman J. W. Griffith also stated that on rounding the curve north of Valmeyer he looked back and saw the marker light on the right side of the caboose displaying green to the front, as was the cupola light.

Engineman Speckins, of extra 1533, stated that while passing through Valmeyer he reduced the speed to about 10 miles an hour, and increased it again while passing through Fountain. The first lights he saw approaching Warnock were the lights at the south end of the passing track; the red cupola light of the caboose ahead then suddenly appeared and he shouted to Fireman Woods, inquiring as to what light it was, at the same time shutting off steam. The fireman replied that he could see the reflection from an engine fire box ahead and that it must be extra 1238, and Engineman Speckins immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, leaned out of the window, saw the red marker on the right side of the caboose, and then the accident occured. Engineman Speckins estimated the speed of his train to have been between 25 and 27 miles an hour when he first saw the red cupola light, about 30 car-lengths distant, and about 15 miles an hour at the time of the accident. The bright light in the headlight of his engine had burned out after leaving Valmeyer and he was using the dim light when approaching Warnock, and while he said he could only see about 15 or 20 car-lengths yet he was of the opinion that he could more readily and clearly distinguish a red light ahead than would have been the case had the bright light of the headlight been in use. His train encountered no fusee, torpedoes or flagman just prior to the accident, nor did he observe any red lights displayed from the rear end of the refrigerator car. Engineman Speckins further stated that occasional mists were encountered in the vicinity of Warnock and that the red cupola light appeared to emerge from a mist; that the air brakes on his train were in proper working order and responded properly to the emergency application made just prior to the accident, and that there was nothing

about the engine to distract his attention or any steam leaks to obscure vision. The statements of Fireman Woods and Brakeman Swartz practically corroborated those of Engineman Speckins. Fireman Woods also stated that while standing on the steps of the tender, just before jumping immediately prior to the accident, he saw what apparently was the red marker light on the left side of the caboose of extra 1238, when it was about 15 car-lengths distant. The front cab window on his side of the engine was closed while the side window was open and he said he did not look out of the side window when approaching Warnock, at which time he was sitting on his seat box, but he had looked through the front window glass, which was clean. Conductor Briggs and Flagman Leake, of extra 1533, were unaware of anything wrong until the air brakes were applied in emergency just prior to the accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Eckels, of extra 1238, to afford proper protection to the rear end of his train.

The evidence is to the effect that on departing from the passing track at Valmeyer, Conductor Eckels turned the blind on the cupola light so that it displayed red to the rear, but that instead of removing the markers from the caboose and then hanging red lights on the rear end of the refrigerator car being hauled behind the caboose, as required, he merely turned the caboose markers so that they displayed red to the rear. In this instance Conductor Eckels was the only member of the crew stationed at the rear of extra 1238, all of the other members being at the head end of the train, why he did not place red lights on the refrigerator car, or afford proper flag protection to the rear of his train when it stopped at Warnock, could not be ascertained.

The track is straight and practically level for several miles approaching Warnock from the south end, although it was dark, the weather conditions apparently did not materially interfere with vision, and it is believed that had Engineman Speckins and Fireman Woods of extra 1533 been on the alert, maintaining a proper lookout approaching the point of accident, they would have seen the caboose markers of extra 1238 in time to have averted the accident.

Gorham is a junction point between the main line and a line extending into the coal fields, and a foreman and four car men formerly were located there. At the present time, however, there is only one car man on duty at that point, and at various times it is necessary for him to go out on the road. Gorham is the terminal for

one freight train and one passenger train. Potts Spur, the point where A.R.L. 14272 first became disabled, is located at mile post 106.75, while there is a repair point at Gale, located approximately 11 miles south of Potts Spur. The records showed that car A.R.L. 14272 became disabled at Potts Spur on June 9 and on June 11 was moved northward to Gorham, a distance of about 22 miles. It is the practice for the agent at Gorham to list these cars to the crew of the local and forward them to Dupo, 78.17 miles north of Gorham, for repairs when the one car man at Gorham can not handle them. This was done with A.R.L. 14272 and investigation developed that this local freight train had handled 11 such bad-order cars behind the caboose from Gorham to Dupo within the 60-day period prior to the day on which this accident occured. It is well recognized that occasionally it is necessary to handle a bad-order car behind a caboose in order to get it to the nearest available repair point, but the handling of such cars for long distances, as a matter of common practice, should not be tolerated. In the interests of safety the officials of this railroad should make such changes in their arrangements for the handling of repairs as will eliminate the situation existing at this point.

All of the employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident the crew of extra 1238 had been on duty less than 14½ hours, and the crew of extra 1533 less than 8 hours, prior to which these employees had been off duty for periods ranging from 12 to 24 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.