

In re Investigation of an accident which occurred on the New Orleans Great Northern Railroad at North Slidell, La.,
April 13, 1916.

May 16, 1916.

On April 13, 1916, there was a rear-end collision on the New Orleans Great Northern Railroad at North Slidell, La., which resulted in the death of two trespassers. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

Southbound freight train No. 51 consisted of 46 cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive 60, and was in charge of Conductor Potter and Engineman Fowler. It left Bogalusa at 3.40 a.m., arrived at North Slidell at 5.48 a.m., and the regular work at this point had just been completed when the rear of the train, which was standing 759 feet inside of the yard limit board, was struck by extra 57, a light engine in charge of Engineman Crook and Flagman Reed, the speed of the light engine at the time of the collision being estimated to have been about 25 miles an hour. The caboose of train No. 51 was destroyed and the car immediately ahead of it considerably damaged, while

locomotive 57 also sustained slight damage.

This is a single-track line, with no block signal system, trains being handled under the telegraphic train order system. Trains in the same direction are required to keep 10 minutes apart except in closing up at passing or meeting stations. Under Rule 93 of the operating department, extras moving on the main track within yard limits must be prepared to stop and must not exceed a speed of 5 miles an hour unless the track is clear and the switches right. This rule reads as follows:

"Yard limits are indicated by yard limit signs. Within these limits trains and engines may use the main track, clearing first class trains at least five minutes and by the time such approaching trains are due to leave the last station at which time is shown. Second and third class trains, extras and engines moving on main track within yard limits must be prepared to stop and must not exceed the speed of five miles per hour unless the track is clear and the switches right. Engines in yard movements will not protect against second and third class or extra trains."

Approaching the point of accident from the north the track is practically straight and level for 18 miles, and the right of way is clear on each side of the track for a distance of about 100 feet. With the exception of yard limit boards located at several points, there are no

fixed signals, such as station signs, mile boards or whistling posts, to assist engine crews in determining their location. On the left side of the track, however, going south, there is a line of telegraph poles, every fifth pole of which is numbered with white figures, painted on both the north and south sides of the poles. At the time of the accident there was a very dense fog.

Engineman Crook stated that he left Bogalusa at 5.10 a.m., and that he stopped and registered at Rio, 6.8 miles from Bogalusa. At the time of registering he noted that train No. 31 had registered about two hours previously. As he proceeded southward from Rio the fog seemed to get thicker, and on account of not knowing exactly where he was he sounded a road crossing signal about every two miles. He knew when he passed Ames, a point about two miles distant from the yard limit board at North Slidell, but did not remember whether or not he noticed when he passed over the low trestle, 62 feet in length, located about half way between Ames and the yard limit board. The first warning he had of his approach to North Slidell was when he saw the yard limit board a few car lengths ahead of him. He shut off steam and made a slight application of the air brakes, passing the board at a speed of about 30 miles an hour. He saw the

cabooses of train No. 51, together with the caboose lights, when about 3 or 4 car lengths distant, and did all he could to stop, but was unable to do so on account of the short distance and the bad condition of the rails. The collision occurred at 6.14 a.m. Engineman Crook also stated that while his locomotive was equipped with an electric headlight it was not of much use on account of the fog. He also said that the brakes of his locomotive were in good condition.

Fireman Hampton said that the first he knew of the approaching collision was when the engineman applied the brakes, reversed the locomotive and opened the throttle. He then looked out of the window, saw the caboose two or three car lengths distant and braced himself for the shock of the collision. He thought the speed at the time of the collision was 18 or 20 miles an hour. He also said that he did not pay any attention to passing Ames and did not remember passing over the bridge between Ames and the yard limit board.

Flagman Reed stated that approaching North Slidell^{he} did not know exactly where he was, on account of not being able to see any landmarks. At about the time the engineman shut off steam he saw the caboose ahead and he

stated that he thought the speed at the time of the collision was about 20 or 25 miles an hour. He also said that he could see only about three or four car lengths on account of the fog, and that he did not see the yard limit board on account of its being on the opposite side of the locomotive.

Conductor Potter, of train No. 51, said that it was very foggy at North Slidell and that in switching about 12 cars at that point it had been necessary for one of the brakemen to pass signals. He stated that he could see an electric headlight about 200 feet, and he did not think the yard limit board could be seen more than two or three car lengths, or possibly four or five car lengths at the most.

Flagman Sumrall, of train No. 51, stated that he was packing a hot-box about 12 cars ahead of the engine, and that he could just see the markers on the engine. He heard locomotive 57 approaching and just before the collision occurred he saw the electric headlight of that locomotive.

Enginemen Fowler, of train No. 51, stated that he had always found it hard to locate a landmark, and that it was very easy to get lost in a fog. If the fog was dense the numbers on the telegraph poles could not be distinguished from a locomotive cab, and he thought that in a country like this, where the surroundings were all the same

and with no landmarks, it would be a good idea to install station signs for the purpose of enabling engine crews to locate themselves. He stated that at Ames the various landmarks were sufficient to enable a man to tell where he was in a fog, but that a low bridge like the one between Ames and the yard limit board might be passed without knowing it unless a man was looking out at the time. He also said that with an electric headlight he could see about 3 or 4 times farther than with an oil headlight if the night was clear, but that on a foggy night it was impossible to see a great distance.

This accident was caused by extra 57 being operated in violation of that part of Rule 93 which requires that extras moving on the main track within yard limits must be prepared to stop and must not exceed a speed of 5 miles an hour unless the track is clear, for which Engineman Crook is responsible. While it appears that it is difficult for engine crews to locate themselves on this part of the road in a dense fog, yet according to his own statement he knew when he passed Ames, a point two miles distant from the yard limit board, and in view of the weather conditions prevailing and the fact that he did not know exactly where he was, he should have so reduced the speed of his locomotive as to

have enabled him to enter the yard limits at a speed not in excess of the 5 miles an hour prescribed by the rule. Had his locomotive passed the yard limit board at this speed, and had he been maintaining a proper lookout under these conditions, this accident undoubtedly would not have occurred.

Engineman Crook was employed as an engineman in 1907, previous to which he had had 5 years experience on other roads as an engineman. In May, 1915, he was suspended for 30 days on account of responsibility for meeting a New Orleans & North Eastern train on Lake Pontchartrain bridge. At the time of the accident he had been on duty less than 2 hours, after a period off duty of 9 hours 25 minutes.