

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD AT CASTORLAND, N. Y.,  
ON FEBRUARY 18, 1926.

March 26, 1926.

To the Commission

On February 18, 1926, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the New York Central Railroad at Castorland, N. Y., resulting in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 20 passengers, 1 mail clerk, and 3 employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with representatives of the Public Service Commission of New York.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the St. Lawrence Division extending between Utica and Carthage, N. Y., a distance of 74.34 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The point of accident was at the east passing-track switch at Castorland, approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for several thousand feet followed by a  $3^{\circ}$  curve to the left extending a distance of 1,401 feet to the east passing-track switch, from which point it is then tangent for a considerable distance. The track is level for more than 4,000 feet, and then for a distance of 1,200 feet is 0.6 per cent ascending eastward, changing to 0.4 per cent descending at the station at Castorland, this descending grade extending to the point of accident 632 feet distant, and for approximately 500 feet beyond.

While the view of the point of accident was limited to a distance of a few hundred feet by reason of the curve and buildings adjacent to the station, there was a clear view of the train-order signal from a point more than 1,600 feet west of the station, or approximately 2,300 feet west of the point of accident.

A light snow was falling at the time of the accident, which occurred at 5.40 a. m.

### Description

Westbound freight train extra 2133-2130 consisted of 60 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 2133 and 2130, and was in charge of Conductor Hutchins and Enginemen Catlin and McFarlane. At Carthage, 8.3 miles from Castorland, train order F4, Form 19, was received, reading as follows.

"Engines 2133 and 2130 coupled run extra  
Carthage to Remsen Meet No 59 Eng 2140  
at Castorland"

A clearance card was also received and the train departed from Carthage at 5.10 a. m., being brought to a stop at the east passing-track switch at Castorland at 5.39 a. m., preparatory to heading in at that point for the purpose of meeting train No. 59; it had been standing less than one minute when it was struck by that train.

Eastbound passenger train No. 59 consisted of two combination mail and baggage cars, one baggage car, two coaches, three Pullman sleeping cars, and one express car, in the order named, hauled by engine 2140, and was in charge of Conductor Regan and Engineman Bell. At Remsen, 44.59 miles from Castorland, the crew received train order F4, Form 31, previously quoted, train No. 59 departing from this point at 4.28 a. m., on time. Station stops were made at three points en route, the last of which was Lowville, about 7 miles distant from Castorland. It departed from Lowville at 5.31 a. m., according to the train sheet, on time, passed the train-order signal in the stop position and collided with extra 2133-2130 at the east switch while traveling at a high rate of speed.

The force of the collision badly damaged all three engines, while the first four cars in extra 2133-2130 and the first two cars in train No. 59 were derailed and damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of train No. 59.

### Summary of evidence

Conductor Regan, of train No. 59, said he delivered train<sup>order</sup> to Engineman Bell at Remsen, that the engineman read the order aloud to him, repeating the word "Castorland," and then commented on the run their train had just made. There was nothing unusual in Engineman Bell's action and he appeared to be normal in every respect. A few minutes later their train departed from Remsen and then maintained schedule speed, the usual station stops being made en route. Conductor Regan said he was riding in the fifth car as his train approached

Castorland, and realizing that fact and not having heard any whistle signals sounded by the engineman he said he was about to signal the engineman by means of the communicating cord when Brakeman Jones sounded two blasts on the communicating cord, immediately following which the air brakes were applied, and he said speed was being reduced when the jar of the collision was felt. After the accident Conductor Regan noted that the train-order signal was in the stop position and that the signal lamp was burning brightly. Conductor Regan admitted his responsibility in connection with his failure to observe rule S-90 of the book of rules of the operating department, relative to the sounding of the meeting-point whistle signal; this rule provides in part that:

"\* \* \* Should the engineman fail to give signal \* \* the conductor must take immediate action to stop the train."

He said that for some time he had had an understanding with Brakeman Jones that the latter would attend to this duty and it was upon failing to hear either the station or the meeting-point whistle signal, and realizing that they were approaching Castorland, that he became alarmed and was about to signal the engineman himself when Brakeman Jones finally took that action. Conductor Regan was unable to advance any reason for the failure of Engineman Bell to remember the meeting point or for the engineman's failure to observe and obey the stop indication of the train-order signal.

Brakeman Jones, of train No. 59, said he had read the order which provided for the meet with the freight train at Castorland and as his train approached Castorland, at which time he was riding in the fourth car, he was listening for the meeting-point whistle signal, upon hearing the station-whistle signal sounded he at once opened the vestibule door and looked across the inside of the curve, noted that the passing track was empty, and then saw that the train-order signal at the station was displaying a stop indication. He at once signalled the engineman and then felt the air brakes being applied, followed shortly by the jar of the collision. Brakeman Jones estimated the speed of the train at the time he observed the train-order signal to have been about 40 miles an hour.

Flagman Cardinal, of train No. 59, said he heard the station whistle signal sounded as his train approached Castorland, followed shortly by a road crossing signal being sounded; he did not hear a meeting-point whistle signal. After the accident he observed that both semaphore arms of the train-order signal were in the stop position

with the light burning brightly.

Agent-Operator Jones said that shortly after reporting for duty at Castorland, at 4.57 a. m., he received train order F4, Form 19, a middle order, addressed to the operator, and before copying or repeating the order he turned on the electric light in the semaphore lamp and placed the eastbound and westbound train-order signals in the stop position. At about 5.39 a. m. the dispatcher asked if the extra had arrived and it was at this time that he heard train No. 59 sound one long blast on the whistle and on looking out he saw the passenger train approaching at a high rate of speed while as the train passed the office window he saw fire flying from the brake shoes, the fire seeming to increase as the rear portion of the train passed.

Engineman Catlin, of extra 2133-2130, said he looked at his watch and noted that it was exactly 5.39 a. m. when he brought his train to a stop at the east passing-track switch, preparatory to heading in at that point for train No. 59. Before the head brakeman had time to get off the engine to open the switch, train No. 59 came around the curve and the three men on the engine jumped just before the accident occurred. The statements of the other members of the crew of extra 2133-2130 brought out no additional facts of importance.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure to obey a meet order, for which Engineman Bell and Conductor Regan, of train No. 59, are responsible.

The evidence is to the effect that Engineman Bell was physically normal at Remsen, at which point he read train order F4 aloud to Conductor Regan, and that he made the proper stops en route, including the stop at Lowville, approximately 7 miles west of Castorland. Scheduled running time was maintained between Lowville and Castorland, this distance being covered in nine minutes, according to the train sheet, or at an average speed of 43 miles an hour. There is a highway crossing located 675 feet west of Castorland station and at a point 1,320 feet farther west there is a whistling post; at or near this point the road-crossing whistle signal was sounded, indicating that Engineman Bell was in possession of his faculties at these points. The fact that the station and road crossing signals were given within such a short distance of the point of accident, and that the air brakes were applied just prior to the accident, are conclusive that Engineman Bell was not

incapacitated at the time, but on account of the fact that both the engineman and fireman were killed as a result of the accident it is impossible to say why neither the meet order nor the stop indication of the train-order signal were obeyed.

Conductor Regan knew at Remsen that extra 2133-2130 had 60 cars in its train and that to fulfill the meet with that train at Castorland it would be necessary to "saw by." He had completed his duties in connection with the collecting of transportation after leaving Lowville and yet permitted his train to approach the meeting point at a high rate of speed without the meeting-point whistle signal having been sounded and took no action toward signaling to the engineman, or toward bringing his train to a stop by means of the conductor's emergency valve, until too late to avert the accident. For his failure he is equally responsible with Engineman Bell for the occurrence of this accident.

Had an adequate automatic train control device been in use on this line this accident would not have occurred.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, and 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.