

## 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 SYRACUSE, N.Y.,  
ON NOVEMBER 29, 1926.

January 20, 1927

To the Commission:

On November 29, 1926, there was a collision between two yard trains on the New York Central Railroad at Syracuse, N. Y., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

The main track of the Watertown Branch, Ontario Division, extends practically north and south, while the tracks of the Syracuse Junction Branch, Syracuse Division, extend practically east and west. There is a yard which parallels the main track of the Watertown Branch, with a wye track which connects the yard lead track with the Syracuse Junction Branch.

The accident occurred on the lead track between the switches leading to yard tracks 4 and 5, just south of the switch connecting the wye with the lead track. The switch stands are of the Ramapo ground-throw type, the targets display yellow when the switch is lined for a movement to the yard tracks, and white when lined for a movement on the lead track.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3 40 p m.

Description

Yard engine 3679, headed south, in charge of Conductor Stevenson and Engineman Duke, was standing on the north end of yard track 5, about 6 or 8 feet north of a disabled box car. A caboose, coupled behind engine 3679, extended out upon the lead track, its rear end being just clear of yard track 4. The engine and caboose had been standing at this point about three minutes when the rear end

of the caboose was struck by the rear end of the caboose of yard train 692, which was making a back-up movement.

Yard engine 692, headed north, with 17 cars and a caboose coupled behind it, was in charge of Conductor Lyons and Engineer Goodman. A back-up movement was being made around the wye, with the intention of using the switch leading to yard track 4; the switch, however, instead of being lined for yard track 4 was lined for the lead track, consequently the train continued on the lead track and collided with the caboose being handled by engine 3679 while traveling at a speed of about 4 miles an hour.

No damage was sustained by any of the equipment and no wheels were derailed, but engine 3679 was driven ahead against the disabled box car and the conductor and a brakeman of engine 3679, who were working on the drawbar of that car, were caught between the engine and the car, the conductor being killed.

#### Summary of evidence.

Fireman Myers, of engine 3679, stated that while his engine stood on yard track 5 Conductor Lyons, of engine 692, came to him and said "Don't back up," and he told Engineer Duke what the conductor had said. Fireman Myers was of the impression that engine 692 was going to make a movement of some kind on the track next to his own engine, but he did not see the movement being made and was unaware of anything wrong until the accident occurred, although he could have seen the position of the switch points had he paid particular attention to them. The statements of Engineer Duke added nothing of importance.

Conductor Lyons, of engine 692, stated that his train made a back-up movement around the wye and was brought to a stop with the caboose just north of the wye track switch and about 15 or 20 feet from the switch leading to yard track 4. He then left Brakeman Michel standing at the caboose and walked a short distance into the yard to determine where he would place his train. He noticed engine 3679 standing on yard track 5 and walked over to the caboose of that train, which stood on the lead track, and measured with his arm to ascer-

tain whether or not it cleared yard track 4, and on finding that there was sufficient clearance he went to the fireman's side of engine 3679 and told the fireman not to move, and heard the fireman transmit this information to the engineer, who replied in the affirmative. Conductor Lyons then stepped over on yard track 4 and gave a back-up signal, and he said his caboose had moved about a car-length before he noticed that it was proceeding on the lead track instead of being backed in on yard track 4, he immediately shouted and waved violent stop signals but it was too late to avert the accident. Conductor Lyons further stated that he had looked at the position of the switches of the crossover between yard tracks 2 and 3, but that he had not noticed the position of the switch leading to yard track 4 although he admitted that he was in position to have seen it when he gave the back-up signal, he could not account for overlooking the position of this switch, although he said there was no normal position for the switches in this yard and that the entire responsibility rested on the crew of the train using them. It further appeared from Conductor Lyons' statements that he had no understanding with Brakeman Michel as to who would line the switches, nor was there any regular practice in this connection, and he felt that since Brakeman Michel was standing about 15 or 20 feet from the switch, with an unobstructed view of it, from the time their train stopped on the wye until the back-up movement was started, the brakeman should have noticed the position of the switch.

Brakeman Michel, of engine 692, stated that when the caboose of his train stopped on the wye it was about 15 or 20 feet from the switch leading to track 4; he knew that Conductor Lyons had not thrown the switch and admitted that he had an unobstructed view of the switch points and target while standing at the caboose, but he was unable to account for his failure to know that the switch was not properly lined for the contemplated movement. When Conductor Lyons gave the back-up signal Brakeman Michel transmitted it to the fireman of engine 692, who was on the inside of the curve, and boarded the forward end of the caboose when the back-up movement began. He then cut off the caboose, looked to see whether or not the movement was being made as intended, saw that it was not, jumped off the caboose and gave stop signals, too

late to prevent the accident. Brakeman Michel further stated that he had no understanding with Conductor Lyons as to who would line switches, this work usually being done by the one nearest the switch; he stated, however, that he usually observed the position of switches and admitted that he should have done so on this occasion.

Engineman Goodman, of engine 692, stated that from his side of the engine he could not see signals given from the rear of the train, but that after standing on the wye track about three or four minutes the fireman, who was on the inside of the curve, told him that a back-up signal had been given. Just after starting the back-up movement, while traveling at a speed of about 3 or 4 miles an hour, the fireman told him that stop signals were being given from the rear end and he at once made an emergency application of the air brakes, it being about at the same time that he felt a jar as though a hard coupling had been made. The statements of Fireman Mumford corroborated in substance those of Engineman Goodman.

Trainmaster Lambert stated that the switches in this yard could be left in any position, that the crews of standing trains were not required to afford protection, and that in the event of an accident the crew of the moving train was at fault.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Lyons and Brakeman Michel, of engine 692, to ascertain definitely that the route was properly lined before starting the back-up movement into the yard.

Conductor Lyons and Brakeman Michel both admitted that they were in full view of the switch leading to yard track 4 and they could not account for their failure to observe, before the back-up movement was started, that the switch was lined for the lead track instead of for yard track 4. Conductor Lyons even measured the distance in order to determine definitely whether the caboose cleared yard track 4, and then stood practically at the switch and gave back-up signals to his train, while Brakeman Michel stood about 15 or

20 feet north of the switch, from which point he could have plainly seen both the switch target and the switch points, and was also fully aware that Conductor Lyons had not thrown the switch.

Conductor Lyons entered the service of this railroad in 1898, while Brakeman Michel entered the service in 1900, their records were good. At the time of the accident none of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,  
Director.