

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE-
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD NEAR VAN
CORTLANDT, N. Y., ON MAY 27, 1923.

June 18, 1923.

To the Commission:

On May 27, 1923, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the New York Central Railroad near Van Cortlandt, N. Y., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of six passengers and one employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Putnam Division extending between Sedwick Avenue and Putnam Junction, N. Y., a distance of 53.49 miles, which in the vicinity of the point of accident is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point 0.57 mile west of Van Cortlandt; approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for a distance of 0.67 mile, followed by a curve of 40 to the right which is 275 feet in length, the first mark of derailment being on the curve about 50 feet from its western end. The grade is 0.1375 descending for eastbound trains. The track is laid with 80-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with 19 treated yellow pine ties to the rail length, double spiked on the outside and single spiked on the inside, ballasted with from 12 to 18 inches of cinder ballast, and maintained in good condition. The weather was clear at the time of the accident which occurred at about 6.14 P. M.

Description.

Eastbound passenger train No. 94 consisted of five coaches and a combination car, all of steel-underframe construction, hauled by engine 2001, and was in charge of Conductor Billmeyer and Engineman Kirk. It left Dunwoodie, 3.79 miles west of the point of accident, at 6.08 P. M., on time, and was derailed near Van Cortlandt while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 30 or 35 miles an hour.

The engine truck wheels were first derailed and ran for a distance of 267 feet before reaching a switch, at which point the driving wheels were derailed, the engine swerving to the left and colliding with some box cars standing on a side track. The engine came to rest on its right side, while the first coach and the forward truck of the second coach were derailed, both of these cars

remaining upright. The employee killed was the engineman.

Summary of evidence.

Fireman Serhey said the engineman had shut off steam and he himself was putting water on the coal in the tender when he felt a severe jolt as if the engine had run over something, and on looking out of the window on the left side he saw sparks flying from under the engine truck. Shortly afterward the engine swerved to the left and became totally derailed,, Fireman Serhey being thrown from the cab at about this time; he was unable to say whether or not the air brakes had been applied. Baggage man Fincke and Conductor Billmeyer noticed nothing wrong until the accident occurred, neither did they notice any application of the air brakes. After the accident Assistant Conductor Prescott found parts of a heavy plank which had been run over and on which there were various wheel marks.

Examination of the plank showed that it was of spruce. 9 inches wide and 3 inches thick, and apparently had been about 8 feet in length. There were flange marks upon it which were gauge distance apart, while on its under side there were impressions made by the running surfaces of the rails which indicated that it had been laid squarely across both rails. There were also marks which indicated that when the engine truck wheels were raised as a result of striking this plank, the left wheels came down on top of the left rail, there being a faint flange mark in about the center of this rail which continued for a distance of 17 feet 6 inches to where the wheel dropped off outside of the rail. Beyond this point there were flange marks made by all four engine truck wheels up to the frog of the switch, from which point the track was badly torn up to the point where the engine came to rest, an additional distance of about 100 feet. On a side track opposite the point where the accident occurred there was a flat car loaded with lumber of various sizes, and on top of this lumber was found a spot lighter in color than the other lumber, the dimensions of which indicated that a plank of the same size as the one causing this accident had been recently removed.

The point of accident was near a park which is a large public playground, and on account of the crowd which assembles on Sundays it is necessary for the railroad police and track walkers to give particular attention to their duties. Considerable trouble has been experienced recently by persons breaking semaphore lenses, and about a year previous a tie was found on the track. On the day of the accident westbound train No. 93 had passed less than an hour prior to train No. 94, at which time there was nothing

wrong. Examination both of track and equipment failed to disclose anything which could have contributed to the accident.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by a plank being placed on the track, undoubtedly with malicious intent.

The investigation developed that there was nothing wrong with the track or equipment, but that a plank had been removed from the lading of a nearby car and placed on the rails, and, probably on account of the cars standing on the side track on the inside of the curve this plank was not seen by the engineman in time to apply the air brakes and bring the train to a stop.

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.