

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 WATERTOWN, N Y , ON FEBRUARY 15, 1925

April 30, 1925

To the Commission

On February 15, 1925, there was a side collision between two light engines on the New York Central Railroad at Watertown, N Y , which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the St Lawrence Division which extends between Watertown Junction and Massena, N. Y., a distance of 88.75 miles, the point of accident being within the limits of the yards located immediately west of Watertown Junction. Pine Street yard is opposite the engine house, while Massey yard is farther to the west, the accident occurred at the western end of Pine Street yard. There are five tracks in this immediate vicinity, the two main tracks are on the south, and then come the west lead, east lead, and inbound engine-house tracks, the last two being those involved in the accident. Near the western end of Pine Street yard there is a crossover connecting these two tracks, the switch on the east-lead track being a facing-point switch for westbound movements. The outbound engine-house track connects with the east lead track at a point about 15 feet east of the east crossover switch, while the switch leading from the lead track to the caboose track is located a short distance east of the outbound engine-house switch. The east lead track is tangent while the inbound engine-house track curves to the left or north, beginning about at the crossover; the outbound engine-house track and the caboose track also curve to the left, the two engine-house tracks being practically parallel at leaving the east lead track.

Massey yard is the terminal for all freight trains of the Ontario Division and also for westbound freight trains of the St Lawrence Division, and the inbound engine-house track is used by engines moving from Massey yard to the engine house at Pine Street yard. The east lead

track is used by engines going westward to Massey Yard either from Pine Street yard or from the engine house

The west switch of the crossover between the east lead track and the inbound engine house track is equipped with a high switch stand, while the east switch has a low stand located on the fireman's side of a westbound engine. Examination of the stand at the east switch showed that the paint on the targets was bright, but on account of being covered with dirt as a result of melting snow it was impossible to distinguish the color even when standing across the track from the switch. It also appeared that at the time of the accident the light on the east switch was not burning.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 11 45 p.m.

Description

Westbound St. Lawrence Division freight train extra 3832, with helper engine 3762 coupled in the train immediately ahead of the caboose, arrived at Massey yard, engine 3762 then cut off and backed the caboose, with Conductor Bloomingdale in charge, toward Pine Street yard on the inbound engine house track, intending to place the caboose on the caboose track. In making this movement the engine continued on the inbound engine house track until it reached the west switch of the crossover leading to the least lead track at about 11.10 p.m. The switches were then lined for the caboose to be moved through this crossover to the east lead track, past the outbound engine house switch, and in on the caboose track, after which the caboose was cut off from the engine and on account of the descending grade it made this movement from its own momentum. The west crossover was then closed and engine 3762 continued to back up on that track on its way to the engine house. While one of the brakemen in the train crew followed the caboose in order to close the various switches, he apparently failed to close the east crossover switch.

At about 11.40 p.m. switch engine 3720, in charge of Engineman McCormican and Brakeman Snodgrass, was moving west on the east lead track and came to a stop on account of the fact that the outbound engine-house switch was open. This switch was closed by Brakeman Snodgrass, and he then gave Engineman McCormican a proceed signal without looking to see whether or not the east crossover switch was closed

The switch stands of the east crossover switch being located on the fireman's side, where it was not within his range of vision, Engineman McCormican accepted this proceed signal as an indication that both switches were properly lined and proceeded slowly, after which he looked back to see that the brakeman boarded the rear of the tender. While proceeding in this manner the engine headed in at the open switch at the least end of the crossover and collided with the side of engine 3764, which was moving eastward on the inbound engine house track.

Engine 3764, headed east, had arrived at Massey yard with an Ontario Division train and was en route to the engine house at Pine Street yard, being operated on the inbound engine house track. The engine was in charge of Engineman Aldridge and Conductor McConnell. It was moving eastward at a low rate of speed and was passing the west switch of the crossover when struck by the front end of engine 3720.

Engine 3720 struck the side of engine 3764 about at the center of the cab and then struck and considerably damaged the right front corner of the tender. The employee killed was Conductor McConnell, who was getting down the steps from the gangway on the right side of engine 3764

Summary of evidence

Engineman Aldridge, of engine 3764, said that when about an engine length from the west crossover switch he saw engine 3720 standing on the east lead track at a point immediately east of the outbound engine-house switch and he also saw Brakeman Snodgrass line that switch and then signal Engineman McCormican to proceed. Engineman Aldridge said he was moving slowly and that he was looking at the track immediately ahead of his engine when he noticed a dark object passing his head, the collision occurring at about that time. Engineman Aldridge further stated that the headlight on each engine was burning.

Engineman McCormican, of engine 3720, said he had previously noted that the light at the east crossover switch was not burning. Shortly afterwards when proceeding toward Massey Yard on the east lead track he made the stop previously referred to for the purpose of allowing the brakeman to close the outbound engine house switch and he said that after starting ahead on the authority of the brakeman's proceed signal he depended on that signal as indicating that the switches were properly lined for the movement of his

engine and consequently looked back to see that the brakeman boarded the tender, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. Engineman McCormican further stated that when making the stop in order to allow the brakeman to close the outbound engine-house switch he was too close to the east crossover switch to see the switch stand from his side of the engine and that he should have inquired of the fireman concerning the indication of the target or else have crossed over to the fireman's side and looked at it himself. Engineman McCormican further stated that after he had first noticed that the switch lamp was not burning he had been so busily engaged in various switching movements that he had not had an opportunity of lighting the lamp or of notifying any one that it was not burning. His opinion of how the switch came to be open was that when the brakeman following the caboose kicked in on the caboose track by engine 3762 was closing the switches he threw the wrong switch, throwing the outbound engine-house switch instead of the east crossover switch. Fireman Coates of engine 3720 was back in the tender with the coal door closed, shoveling down coal, and the first he knew of anything wrong was when the accident occurred.

Head Brakeman Snodgrass said that when closing the outbound engine-house switch he did not notice that the light was not burning on the east crossover switch, nor did he notice the position of the switch points. He said he could have seen them had he looked, as the two switches were only about 15 feet apart and his only reason for not noticing the position of the east crossover switch was that his attention was occupied by engine 3764 approaching on the inbound engine-house track. Brakeman Snodgrass understood that when giving a proceed signal it indicates to the engineman that the switches are properly lined and he also understood that he is responsible when giving such a signal for knowing that the switches are lined for the movement to be made.

Yard Conductor Sharp, assigned to switch engine 3720, said he acts as yardmaster at Pine Street yard from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., that he had no occasion to observe the switches, and knew nothing of the accident until he heard the crash. Yard Brakeman Cleary, also assigned to switch engine 3720, had gone to the yard office and knew nothing of the accident until after its occurrence.

Conductor Bloomingdale, in charge of the caboose being handled by engine 3762, said Brakeman Amann lined the switches ahead of the caboose, while Brakeman Brady closed the switches behind the caboose. Conductor Bloomingdale said that as he recalled it there was one switch on which there was no light and that he waited until a signal was

received from the brakeman lining the switches before kicking the caboose through the crossover on to the caboose track. After this movement had been made he did not ask the brakeman as to whether they had lined the switches properly.

Brakeman Amann had adjusted the two crossover switches and the caboose-track switch and he said he then stood at the caboose-track switch and waited for Brakeman Brady, who was following the caboose, to close the switches and join him. His statements indicated that he did not watch to see that Brakeman Brady lined all the switches properly; he was positive that Brakeman Brady threw the switch leading to the outbound engine-house track but did not know whether or not he closed the east crossover switch. In this connection attention is called to the fact that the outbound engine-house switch was already closed and that if Brakeman Brady operated this switch, as Brakeman Amann said he did, then he must have opened it, which would account for the fact that when engine 3720 approached on its way to Massey yard it found the outbound engine-house switch open, as well as the east crossover switch.

Brakeman Brady said he closed the west crossover switch after the caboose had been kicked through the crossover and then closed the east crossover switch, but did not close the caboose-track switch, which he said had been closed by Brakeman Amann. He was positive that the second switch to be operated by him was the east crossover switch and not the outbound engine-house switch. Both of these brakemen had noticed that the lamp at the east crossover switch was not burning but made no efforts to light it.

Yard Brakeman Forshaw, on duty earlier in the evening, said he had noticed that the lamp at the east crossover switch was not burning and that he examined it, found the wick to be all right with plenty of oil in the cup, and that he then lighted it. While he saw it burning properly on several occasions after that time, yet about an hour prior to the occurrence of the accident he noted that it had again gone out, but he did not stop to relight it.

The only conflict in the testimony is between the statement of Brakeman Amann that he saw Brakeman Brady throw the outbound engine-house switch, while Brakeman Brady denied that he threw the switch and was positive that he closed the east crossover switch. Investigation indicated that these switches had not been used after Brakeman Brady handled them.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Brakeman Snodgrass, of engine 3720, to observe the position of the east crossover switch before giving his engineman a signal

to proceed, and by the failure of Brakeman Brady of ^{the} crew of extra 3832, to close this switch after it had been used by another member of his crew.

When engine 3720 was en route to Massey yard it was found that the switch leading from the outbound engine-house track was open. This switch is only about 15 feet from the east crossover switch and in view of the fact that Brakeman Snodgrass knew his engine was not to use the crossover but was to continue on the east lead track, it was incumbent on him when closing the outbound engine-house switch, to know that the east crossover switch was also properly lined for the movement of his engine before giving Engineman McCormican a signal to proceed, particularly in view of the fact that the switch stand was on the fireman's side of the engine and could not be seen by the engineman.

Brakeman Brady seemed to be certain that he closed the east crossover switch but not only did the investigation indicate that he was the last person to use the switch, but Brakeman Amann said he saw Brakeman Brady adjust the outbound engine-house switch. This last mentioned switch had not been used in kicking the caboose in on the caboose track and it seems probable that Brakeman Brady operated the wrong switch.

Both of these brakemen, as well as many other employees, had noted that the switch lamp on the east crossover switch was not lighted. One of them said he had lighted it earlier in the evening, but none of the others appeared to have paid any attention to it in spite of instructions to the contrary. Had any of these employees seen fit to light the lamp or to report its condition it is possible it might have been attended to, and had it been burning Brakeman Snodgrass possibly would have had his attention directed to the fact that the switch was not lined for the movement intended to be made by engine 3720. In this connection it may be stated that it did not appear that there was anything wrong with the switch lamp, other than the fact that it was very smoky, while the targets were dirty.

The employees involved were experienced men and none of them had been on duty in violation of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director