INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE OREGON-WASHINGTON RAILROAD & NAVIGATION COMPANY, UNION PACIFIC SYSTEM, AT PREACHER'S SLOUGH, WASH., ON JANUARY 11, 1929.

March 29, 1929.

To the Commission:

On January 11, 1929, there was a collision between a freight train and a log train on the Oregon-Washington Railroad & Navigation Company, Union Pacific System, at Preacher's Slough, Wash., resulting in the death of two employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Department of Public Works, State of Washington.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Gray's Harbor Branch of the First Division, extending between Centralia and Hoquiam, Wash., a distance of 57.5 miles, this is a single-track branch line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The yard limits at Preacher's Slough are 6,355 feet in length and the accident occurred almost midway between the yard-limit boards, or about 475 feet west of the west switch of the passing track, this passing track is 1,751 feet in length and parallels the main track on the north. There is also a log roll-way track, 1,651 feet in length, which is merely a continuation of the passing track at its western end, the west switch of the log roll-way track connecting with the main track at a point about 1,465 feet west of the west switch of the passing track. Approaching the point of accident from the west the track is tangent for a distance of 2,538.4 feet, followed by a 3° curve to the left 1,240 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 665 feet from its western end. Approaching from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 556.1 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The track is level for distances of 700 feet west and 300 feet east of the point of accident, but the grade ascends from each of these directions toward the level track, the gradient being 0.3 per cent on each side of the level track.

The rules require all trains and engines to move under control within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, under control

is defined as being able to stop within one-half the distance the track is seen to be clear. The rules further require that when cars are pushed by an engine a trainman must take a conspicuous position on the front of the leading car.

An unobstructed view of an engine standing at the point of accident can be had across the inside of the curve from the front end of the leading car of an approaching eastbound train for a distance of 1,310 feet.

The weather was slightly hazy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 2.05 p. m.

Description

Westbound freight train No. 987 consisted of seven cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1743, and was in charge of Conductor Reese and Engineman Steele. On arrival at Preacher's Slough the train was brought to a stop on the main track at about 2.04 p.m., with the rear end of the caboose just west of the west switch of the passing track and the front end of the engine at a point about 475 feet west of that switch. Immediately afterwards the opposing log train was observed backing eastward on the main track and an attempt was made to back train No. 987 into clear on the passing track but before this could be accomplished the front end of engine 1743 was struck by the caboose of the log train.

Eastbound freight train extra 748, known as the Cosmopolis switcher, consisted from east to west of a steel-underframe caboose, one empty steel flat car, and 60 loaded cars, shoved by engine 748, which was headed west and backing up. This train was enroute from the east end of the siding at Cosmopolis to Preacher's Slough, a distance of about 3.5 miles, and was entering the yard at the latter point when it collided with train No. 987 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 12 and 15 miles per hour.

The caboose of extra 748 was completely telescoped by the adjacent steel flat car, which car was damaged to some extent, as was also the case with the front end of engine 1743. The employees killed were the conductor of extra 748 and a traveling car inspector, both of whom were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident.

Summary of evidence

It is the practice for westbound train No. 987 to be brought to a stop on the main track with the rear end of the caboose just west of the west switch of the passing track at Preacher's Slough to await the arrival of

the eastbound log train, which train usually arrives before the time train No 987 is scheduled to leave, 2.20 p.m. In the event the log train arrives in due course train No. 987 backs into clear on the passing track, thereby permitting the log train to back up eastward on the main track until it reaches a point in the vicinity of the west switch of the passing track. The log train is then brought to a stop, after which its forward portion is cut off and backed in on the log roll-way track at the west switch of that track. Following this movement the engine recouples to the rear portion of the log train and this portion is then backed eastward on the main track until it is clear of the west switch of the passing track, thereby permitting train No. 987 to depart westward from the passing track.

Engineman Steele, of train No. 987, stated that on arrival at Preacher's Slough he let the train drift over the west switch of the passing track at a low rate of speed, brought it to a stop and then looked back for a signal in case the rear end of the train was not west of the switch, or for a signal to back into clear on the passing track. Engineman Steele then looked ahead again across the inside of the curve and saw smoke some distance away, after which he looked back again for a signal, but none was given. He then watched for the log train and saw it approaching around the curve, at which time he estimated that its caboose was about 15 car-lengths distant, but he did not feel the least bit uneasy as this was the customary procedure at this point and he anticipated no trouble, being of the opinion that he could get his own train back out of the way or that the log train would be brought to a stop as usual. Engineman Steele then reversed his engine and when he looked ahead again he observed that the log train was approaching at a higher rate of speed than he at first thought was the case and he therefore made an attempt to get his train back out of the way but the driving wheels slipped and the accident occurred at about the time he got his train started. Engineman Steele had no idea but that he would be able to back up without any trouble, the same as had been done on previous occasions, and keep clear of the log train, and he said that when he saw the log train getting close he probably made toomuch of an effort to get back out of the wey and this resulted in the slipping of the driving wheels. Engineman Steele said that his train had not been standing more than a minute or so before it was struck, that the air brakes on his train were fully released, and that in his opinion his train had backed up about one-half a car-length when the accident occurred, he also said that there was no one riding on the rear of the caboose of the log train. Fireman Harmon paid no attention to the log train until Engineman Steele called that it was coming and when the fireman saw the caboose it was about four car-lengths distant, he saw no one on the

rear end of the caboose and said that on previous occasions his train had been meeting the log train at this point but that there had always been some one on the caboose.

Conductor Reese and Brakemen Cobb, Ramser and Pierce were riding on the caboose when train No. 987 was brought to a stop at Preacher's Slough. Shortly after stopping Brakeman Pierce, who was looking ahead from the caboose cupola, observed the log train approaching, about six car-lengths from the engine, and he informed the other members of the crew accordingly, all of these employees getting off the caboose, Brakeman Pierce said he was not then the least bit apprehensive that the log train would not stop. Conductor Reese and Brakeman Cobb started ahead, while Brakeman Ramser went to the west switch of the passing track and opened it and Brakeman Pierce proceeded toward the inside switch, the one that connects the passing track with the log roll-way track, but the accident occured before Brakeman Pierce had reached it. Conductor Reese had reached a point about two car-lengths from his own caboose, and he said he did not see any one on the caboose of the log train. He thought that Engineman Steele made an attempt to back train No. 987 out of the way but did not succeed in moving it. Conductor Reese also stated that ordinarily there are bad-order cars standing on the passing track, which was the case in this instance, and for that reason it was customary for train No. 987 to back in at the west switch. It also appeared from his statements that some time ago Conductor Anderson, of the log train, had told him that upon arrival at Preacher's Slough, whenever the log train was not there, train No. 987 should pull by the west switch of the passing track so as to be able to back in, thereby making it unnecessary for the log train to back outside of yard limits in order to let train No. 987 out. Conductor Reese stated that for a number of years heretofore Conductor Anderson had always been on the front end of the leading car of the log train when it was backing into the yard.

Brakeman Naismith, of extra 748, stated that at North River Junction a terminal test and also a running test was made of the air brakes and they worked properly; approaching Preacher's Slough the speed of the log train was about 12 to 15 miles per hour. Brakeman Naismith rode on the rear platform of the caboose attending the tail hose until he had reached a point a short distance west of the west switch or the log roll-way track, at which point he got off on the engineman's side of the train, as he had been instructed to do by Conductor Anderson, in order to assist with the work. After getting off he saw Brakeman Hayes, who had also gotten off the log train and was about six or seven car-lengths to the east, give a stop signal with a lighted fusee, the accident occurring immediately afterwards. He did not see train No. 987 and said that he

did not notice any air-brake application on the log train prior to the accident. Brakeman Naismith, who had been on this run about nine days, said that it was customary for both brakemen to get off the front end of the leading car in the vicinity of the west switch of the log roll-way track, as was done on this occasion, and to rely on the conductor to take up a position on the rear end of the caboose as the train backed up, and he further stated that when he got off the caboose he was certain that Conductor Anderson knew that both brakemen had gotten off and that the rear end of the caboose was not protected.

Brakeman Mayes, of extra 748, stated that the caboose of the log train was equipped with a back-up hose and there was also a conductor's emergency valve in the cupola. Conductor Anderson was riding at his desk in the caboose when approaching Preacher's Slough and Brakeman Mayes said that when he got off the caboose near the west switch of the log roll-way track, at which time the speed of the train was about 15 miles per hour, the conductor was on his feet and going toward the rear end of the caboose. After getting off Brakeman Mayes lighted a fusee, then he saw the engine of train No. 987 and automatically gave a stop signal with the fusee. Other statements of Brakeman Mayes practically corroborated those of Brakeman Naismith as to the work being performed in the customary manner and as to what transpired prior to the accident. He also said that he heard Conductor Anderson instruct Brakeman Naismith to get off at the log roll-way switch.

Engineman Murphy, Fireman Whiting and Brakeman Shirer, of extra 748, were riding on the engine at the time of the accident. They stated that both terminal and running tests were made of the air brakes at North River Junction and that the log train was brought to a stop by the running test. Engineman Murphy said that his train was backing up at a speed of about 12 or 13 miles per hour when he saw the stop signal given with the fusee by Brakeman Mayes, and he at once opened the throttle, in order to keep the slack bunched and to prevent a break-in-two, and applied the air brakes, at about which time the collision occurred. Engineman Murphy was satisfied that the log train could have been stopped within one-half the distance the track could be seen to be clear, he was relying on the conductor to apply the air brakes from the rear, saying that the brakeman generally get off at the roll-way switch. Brakeman Shirer was of the opinion that the air brakes applied as a result of the collision.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Anderson, of extra 748, properly to supervise the back-up movement being made by his train.

The testimony clearly showed that it was customary for the westbound freight train to be brought to a stop on the main track with its rear end just west of the west switch of the passing track and then to back in the clear on the passing track upon the arrival of the eastbound log train. As a matter of fact, according to the statements of Conductor Reese, of train No. 987, it was at the suggestion of Conductor Anderson that such arrangements for the meeting of these two trains at Preacher's Slough were made, in order to make it unnecessary for the log train to back outside of yard limits in order to let train No. 987 out of the passing track. On this occasion, however, for some unexplained reason Conductor Anderson neither brought the log train to a stop by means of the back-up hose, located at the rear-end of the caboose, or by the conductor's emergency valve, located in the caboose cupola. It was also developed that it was customary for the brakeman to get off the log train at the west switch of the log roll-way track and for Conductor Anderson to take up a position on the leading end of the caboose, but that the conductor did not do so in this instance although he had instructed Brakeman Naismith, who attended the tail hose en route from Cosmopolis, to get off at the log roll-way track in order to assist with the work. Apparently the log train was backing up under proper control within yard limits and had Conductor Anderson been maintaining a proper lookout ahead and watching for the movement, safety and care of his train the accident could have been averted.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.