

In re Investigation of accident on the Pennsylvania Railroad (Buffalo Division) at Portville, N. Y., October 20, 1913.

On October 20th, 1913, there was a side collision between a freight train and a light engine on the Pennsylvania Railroad at Portville, N. Y., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of two employees.

After investigation of this accident, the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

The Buffalo Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad on which this accident occurred, extends between Buffalo, N. Y., and Emporium, Pa., a distance of 121.2 miles. It is for the most part a single track line upon which trains are operated under the manual block system. The trains involved in this accident were regular northbound freight train No. 95, and a northbound light engine running as an extra. On October 19th, train No. 95 consisting of engine No. 2624, 21 loaded cars and a caboose, left Emporium at 9:45 p. m., in charge of conductor Mulcahy and engineman Rockford. There is a heavy grade northward from Emporium to Keating Summit a distance of 14 miles, and engine 3024 in charge of engineman Erway and flagman Johnson was used to help train 95 from Emporium to the top of this grade. Upon arrival at Keating Summit at 10.47 p. m., engine 3024 was detached from train 95 and was run as an extra northward from that point, behind train No. 95.

Train No. 95 arrived at Portville at about 12.50 a. m., October 20th, and took the siding for southbound train No. 58 due at that place at 12.54. Extra 3024 followed train No. 95 closely into Portville and went on the siding behind train No. 95 to meet train No. 58. Upon arrival of his train at Portville, conductor Mulcahy inquired of the operator at the telegraph office if there were any orders for him, and upon being informed that there were not, returned to his train and signaled the engineman to move down toward the north end of the siding, with the intention of leaving on his time card rights as soon as he got a clear block signal.

Shortly before the arrival of train No. 95 at Portville, a leak developed in the air brake pipe on engine 2624, causing the brakes to stick, and on arrival of the train at Portville, engineman Rockford endeavored to repair the leak, which was located in a union in the return pipe between the main reservoir and brake valve of his engine. He did not wholly succeed in repairing this leak, as after completing his work he could only get a pressure of about 50 pounds of air in the train line.

After pumping up the air pressure in his train line to 50 pounds, and receiving a signal from the conductor, engineer Rockford started his train toward the north end of the side track, intending to stop there and communicate with the block operator, from a telephone booth located at that point, for the purpose of getting a clear block permitting him to proceed with his train. Train No. 95 moved ahead towards the north end of the side track, which is about 4,000 feet long, at a speed of 8 or 9 miles per hour. The night was very dark and rainy, and engineer Rockford did not perceive that he was getting close to the end of the side track until his engine was almost at the fouling point. He then immediately applied the brakes, but the air pressure being low the engine did not stop until it ran out of the side track far enough to foul the main track.

After train No. 95 had started to pull down to the north end of the side track, engineer Erway of extra 3024 received an order from the dispatcher to run his engine ahead of train No. 95 from Portville to Olean. This order was addressed to both trains, but as train No. 95 had already moved away from the telegraph office, the crew of that train could not receive the order until the engineer or conductor communicated with the operator from the telephone booth, which they were required to do in order to receive notice that the block was clear, permitting their train to proceed. Upon receiving this order and getting a clear block from the operator, engineer Erway backed his engine out of the south end of the side track and started northward on the main track.

When train No. 95 started toward the north end of the side track, flagman Brewster of that train changed the color of the markers on the rear of the caboose from green to red, indicating that the train was to proceed on the main track. When extra 3024 started north on the main track behind train No. 95, engineer Erway noted the red lights on the rear of the caboose and whistled for the flagman to change them to green so as to permit his engine to pass. Flagman Brewster thereupon changed the lights and extra 3024 proceeded at a speed of 16 or 20 miles per hour, arriving at the north end of the side track and colliding with engine 2824 at the fouling point shortly after the latter engine had come to a stop. On account of the darkness, and a 4° curve to the left leading up to the north end of the side track, engineer Erway was unable to see the engine of train No. 95 until he was almost upon it.

Engineer Rockford was not expecting extra 3024 to run ahead of his train, and when he saw that his engine had fouled the main track he did not immediately attempt to back into clear, but instead lit a torch and prepared to go to the

telephone booth, just at which time both he and his fireman noted extra 3024 almost upon them, and only had time to jump before the collision. The two employees killed were student brakemen who were riding on the engine of train No. 95.

The direct cause of this accident was the failure of engineman Hockford of train No. 95 to stop his engine inside the fouling point at north end of Portville side track. Contributing to the accident was the failure of engineman Erway of extra 3024 to run his engine at caution past train No. 95 until he knew that everything was clear.

There was no derailing device to protect the fouling point at the north end of Portville side track. On many railroads where passing track switches connect such passing tracks with main line tracks, derailing devices are installed for the prevention of such accidents as the one here under consideration, and had such a derailing device been installed and in operation on this passing track, the engine of train No. 95 would have been derailed but the collision would have been averted.

None of the employees involved in this accident were working in violation of any of the provisions of the Hours of Service law.