

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE PERE  
MARQUETTE RAILROAD NEAR BEITNER, MICH.,  
On AUGUST 20, 1919.

October 14, 1919.

On August 20, 1919, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Pere Marquette Railroad near Beitner, Mich., which resulted in the death of 5 employees and 1 mail clerk and the injury of 34 passengers and 3 employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety submits the following report:

The accident occurred on Sub-division 5 of the Chicago-Petoskey Division, which is a single-track line extending between Grand Rapids and Traverse City, Mich., a distance of 147.6 miles. No block signals are in use, trains being operated by time table and train orders. Approaching the point of collision from the south there is 3,230 feet of tangent track, followed by a 2-degree curve to the left 1,770 feet in length. The collision occurred on this curve about 470 feet north of its southern end. Approaching from the north there is 4,250 feet of tangent track followed by the curve above mentioned. On the inside of this curve is a bluff 40 feet in height, which restricted the view across the inside of the curve to about 600 feet.

With the exception of 2,200 feet of level track, the grade is approximately 1% descending for northbound trains for a distance of nearly 4 miles. It is then level for about 1,400 feet followed by 350 feet of slightly descending grade to the point of collision. Approaching from the opposite direction there is 2,500 feet of .8% ascending grade and 2,650 feet of .1% ascending grade to the point of collision.

Southbound passenger train No. 6, en route from Petoskey to Chicago, consisted of one combination mail and express car, one combination smoking car, one coach, and one parlor car, hauled by engine 386, and was in charge of Conductor Owens and Engineman Gage. It left Day View, one mile north of Petoskey, at 8:32 a. m., on time, passed Boardman, the last open telegraph office, at 11:32 a. m., on time, and at about 11:40 a. m., collided with northbound extra 362 at a point about 4.5 miles south of Boardman, or 1.6 miles north of Beitner, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 35 or 40 miles an hour.

Northbound freight train extra 362 consisted of 11 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 362, and was in charge of Conductor Neubecker and Engineman Highmy. It passed Grawn, the last open telegraph office, at 11.31 a. m., with no orders relative to train No. 6, and collided with the train while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles an hour.

The passenger engine was turned almost completely around, but remained upright. The cistern of the tender was torn from its frame, while the combination mail and express car was telescoped a little over half its length. The boiler of the freight engine was torn from its frame and came to rest diagonally across the track. Its rear end rested on top of the rear end of the passenger engine, while its forward end rested on about the center of the underframe of the combination mail and baggage car. The tender of the freight engine and the first five cars of extra 362 were destroyed. The forward trucks of the sixth car were derailed, the remainder of the train being intact. Both engine crews and the head brakemen of the freight train were the employees killed.

Conductor Neubecker, of extra 362, stated that the flagman gave proceed signals as the various stations were passed, including Grawn. Approaching Beitner they were talking about the speed and he told the flagman he did not think it was over 25 miles an hour. The flagman thought the speed was increasing and tried the air a little to make sure that it was in working order. After passing Beitner he was talking with the flagman about a switch having been removed from that point, and about handling a train on the grade, about which time the collision occurred. He looked up, saw a boiler going in the air and thought it had exploded, not realizing that his train had collided with train No. 6 until he left the caboose. He stated he had entirely forgotten the passenger train. He estimated the speed of his train to have been about 25 miles an hour, and said he had not felt any application of the air brakes prior to the collision.

Flagman Peete stated that at each station he had passed signals to the head brakemen, who was riding on the engine. The conductor had finished his work when the train was passing Grawn and the two of them went in the cupola of the caboose, the conductor on the left side and the flagman on the right side. They then began to talk about their work and about operating trains when coming up the grade. He then asked the conductor if he did not think they were traveling rather fast down hill and the conductor said he did not think so. The flagman then remarked that he was going to watch the engine to see if the engineman whistled for brakes. He thought the speed was a little excessive on account of there having been some previous trouble with the air pump. He tried the air, but found it to be all right, while the conductor used the retaining valve and held the train a little going down the hill. He next saw the engine rising in the air at the time the collision occurred. He stated he had entirely forgotten train No. 6, as he was paying more attention to train No. 1, which was following his own train.

Conductor Owens, of train No. 6, stated that he felt an application of the brakes, followed almost immediately by the collision. He estimated the speed at the time to have been about 35 or 40 miles an hour. Baggage Master Auseon stated that only a few

seconds elapsed between the time the brakes were applied and the time of the collision. His statements were corroborated by Brakeman Hansen, who also stated he thought the speed was about 35 miles an hour.

At the time extra 362 passed Crown, the operator on duty at that point had gone to dinner, intending to return in time for train No. 6. He had been given permission by the dispatcher to do this, and when he left the office left the train order board in the clear position. Dispatcher Mitchell stated that it was about 11:44 or 11:45 a.m. when the operator called him and wanted to know about train No. 6, at the same time saying that the freight extra had passed. The dispatcher stated he then supposed that the freight train intended going to Beltner for train No. 6.

This accident was caused by the crew in charge of extra 362 overlooking train No. 6, a superior train, resulting in their train occupying the main track on the time of that train without authority or protection.

Engineman Eighmy was employed as a fireman in 1904 and promoted to engineman in 1912. In November, 1913, he was suspended for 10 days for using the main line against an opposing train, and in March, 1917, he was suspended for 15 days for responsibility in connection with a collision. Conductor Neubecker was employed as a switchman in October, 1892, promoted to night yardmaster in November of the same year, to general yardmaster in 1902, and to trainmaster in March, 1904. In June of the same year, he was reduced to yardmaster and in 1906 transferred to train service as a freight conductor. He was suspended for 30 days in 1915 for failing properly to protect his train, resulting in a collision. Flagman Peets was employed as a brakeman in 1916. In June, 1918, he was suspended for 20 days for violation of the flagging rule.

At the time of the accident the crew of the freight train had been on duty 12 hours and 10 minutes, prior to which the conductor had had nine hours off duty and the engineman about 44 hours off duty, while the flagman had been off duty for several weeks. The crew of the passenger train had been on duty 3 hours and 40 minutes, after having had 13 hours and 45 minutes off duty.

G. V. L.