

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
PERE MARQUETTE RAILWAY AT MCGREW JUNCTION, MICHIGAN,
ON JULY 25, 1930.

September 11, 1930.

To the Commission:

On July 25, 1930, there was a side collision between a light engine and a yard engine, handling two cars, on the Pere Marquette Railway at McGrew Junction, Mich., which resulted in the death of one employee.

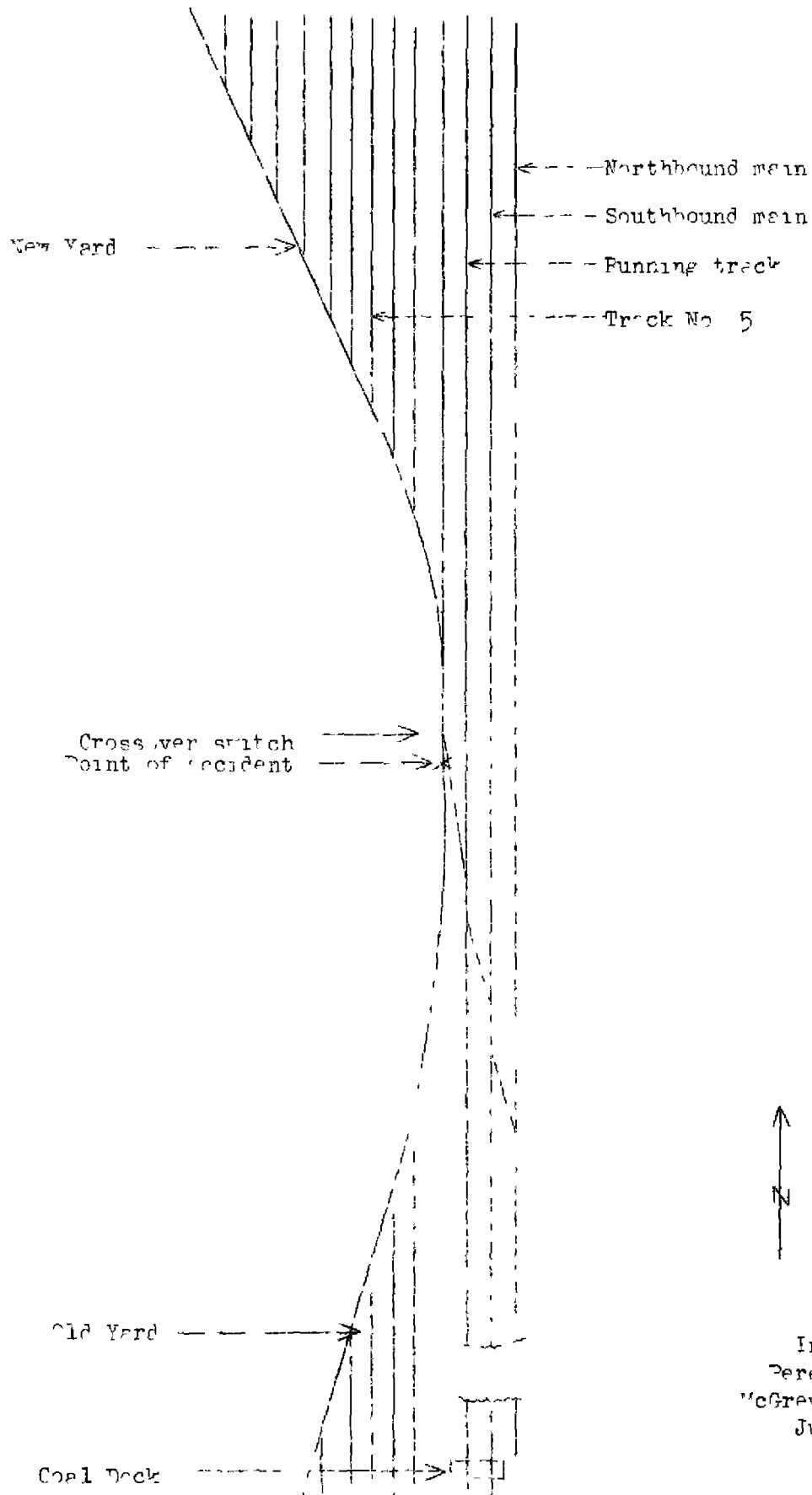
Location and method of operation

McGrew Junction is located on Subdivision No. 1 of the Toledo-Ludington Division; there are two yards at this point, the tracks extending north and south, the new yard being located north of the old yard. To the east of these yards and running parallel their entire length are a running track and southbound and northbound main tracks, respectively, and at about the center of the old yard lead track, which connects the two yards, there are three crossovers leading from the lead track through to the northbound main track. The accident occurred at the fouling point between the lead and running tracks. A coal dock is located adjacent to the running and main tracks at a point approximately 2,090 feet south of the north switch of the crossover involved. The grade is level and the yards are lighted by flood lights.

It was dark, and the weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:20 p. m.

Description

The light engine involved was engine 143, headed south, which had arrived at McGrew Junction, hauling southbound extra 143, and was in charge of Engineman Etter and Fireman LeRoy. After setting off the train on track 9 of the new yard, engine 143 proceeded southward through the lead track and crossovers to the coal dock, where coal and water were taken, the engine returning to the new yard preparatory to picking up a train from track 5. A yard engine was doing some work on this track, however, and engine 143 was again moved south to the clearance point on the first crossover, between the lead track



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and the running track, clear of the lead track. After standing there about six or eight minutes Engineman Etter saw a back-up signal given by his brakeman, and thinking it was intended for him he started his engine backward, but had moved it only a short distance when it collided with engine 1320, which was moving southward on the old lead track.

Yard engine 1320, headed north and hauling two cars, was in charge of Conductor Aspin and Engineman Montgomery. This engine was backing from track 5 to the lead track with the intention of going to the old yard, and was sideswiped by engine 143 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 2 and 6 miles per hour.

The tender of engine 143 struck the tender of engine 1320 about 7 feet from the rear on its right side; evidently engine 143 had stopped at this point and engine 1320 continued to back up, raking the side of the tender and resulting in right side of the cab being crushed against the boiler head. Neither engine was derailed. The employee killed was the engineman of engine 1320.

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Summary of evidence

Engineman Etter, of engine 143, stated that he received a back-up signal from Brakeman Spaulding; he noted that the switch showed a yellow indication and backed up after having received a second back-up signal, and had moved about 50 feet when his engine collided with engine 1320. As he started to back up, he saw his fireman looking out of his window, but did not hear him say anything. He saw the rear end of the tender of engine 1320 just before the engines collided, applied the brakes by means of the independent brake, reversed the engine and used steam. Fireman LeRoy said that during the time they stood on the crossover, he was engaged in looking after the fire, and just as his engine started to back up he was putting on the inspirator. He saw engine 1320 approaching and called to the engineman, but by that time the latter was applying the brakes.

Head Brakeman Spaulding, of engine 143, stated that when his engine stopped on the crossover to clear for engine 1320 he stood about three car-lengths north of engine 143, on the west side of the old yard lead

track opposite the switch, and watched the movement of engine 1320 on track 5 until it started to move toward him; he lined the switch for engine 1320 to move through the lead track southward and gave them a back-up signal. At the time he threw the switch, he noticed that the signal indication was green, at which time engine 1320 was about six car-lengths distant and traveling at a speed of about 6 miles per hour. Just prior to giving the signal, he noticed that engine 143 was standing into clear, and he did not again look toward that engine.

Fireman Young, of engine 1320, stated that after doing some work in the new yard, they were instructed by the conductor to pull into the old yard lead track and go to supper. He looked ahead and saw that the highway crossing, which is located approximately 200 feet north of the point of accident, was clear and notified the engineman to that effect. The switch lights showed a green indication and he then heard a scraping noise. Fireman Young crossed to the engineman's side and saw that the two engines had collided, called to the engineman to look out, and jumped from his own side of the cab. He thought his engine had been traveling at a speed of about 2 miles per hour.

Conductor Aspin, of yard engine 1320, stated that after completing their work in the new yard they started toward the old yard lead track. Conductor Aspin was riding on the front footboard on the engineman's side of engine 1320 and when they reached the highway crossing he got off. Engine 143 was then standing into clear on the crossover, but when the tender of engine 1320 had passed the tender of engine 143 about 6 or 8 feet, engine 143 started to back up and sideswiped engine 1320. Conductor Aspin stated that the switches were lined for the lead track; he did not know whether or not the rear headlight on engine 1320 was burning, but the engine bell was ringing when it passed over the highway crossing. He estimated the speed of his engine to have been about 3 or 4 miles per hour.

Switchman LeRoux, of engine 1320, stated that he was riding on top of the box car next to the engine, and when they were at a point about 450 feet north of the switch leading from the old yard lead track to track 1, or the running track, he noted that the switch showed a yellow indication and immediately afterward was changed to a green indication, but he did not know who threw the switch. At this time engine 143 was standing into clear on the crossover and the rear light on this

engine was burning. He did not see any signals given, and estimated the speed of his engine to have been about 4 miles per hour. The statements of Switchman Bolger, who was riding on the ladder of this box car, brought out nothing of importance.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the misinterpretation of a hand signal.

Rule 7-A, of the operating rules, reads as follows:

"Employees giving signals must locate themselves so as to be plainly seen give signals in a manner to be readily understood, and use the utmost care to avoid taking wrong signals. Until both conductor and engineman know that a signal is given for them, they must not move their train."

The evidence indicates that Engineman Etter saw his brakeman give the back-up signal to the crew of engine 1320, but in some way, instead of complying with the rule quoted, he reached the erroneous conclusion that the signal was intended for the movement of his own engine, and proceeded to start the movement he thought was desired, without ascertaining from the fireman if the way was clear, although his own view was obstructed by the tender of his engine. The weight of evidence also indicated that the switch lamp was displaying a green indication, and not a yellow indication, before engine 143 started to move back through the crossover.

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

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.