

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE PHILADELPHIA & READING RAILWAY AT MINTZERS, PA., ON NOVEMBER 15, 1922

December 14, 1922.

To the Commission:

On November 15, 1922, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Philadelphia & Reading Railway at Mintzers, Pa., resulting in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 1 employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Shamokin Division which extends between Z Tower and Newberry Junction, Pa., a distance of 105 3 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point approximately 475 feet south of the station at Mintzers, approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of 2,350 feet, followed by a curve of 7° 15' to the left, 590 feet in length, following which is a tangent 780 feet long on which the collision occurred, about 250 feet from its southern end. The north end of Tamaqua tunnel, 920 feet in length, is located 5,625 feet south of Mintzers station. The grade is ascending for a considerable distance, being about 1 per cent at the point of accident. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.55 p.m.

Description.

Northbound freight train extra 1629 consisted of 86 cars, hauled by engine 1629, with helper engine 1515 coupled on the head end, and was in charge of Conductor Wagner and Engineman Scott. This train left Tamaqua with instructions to go to Mintzers siding, 3 miles distant, and was stopped opposite the station at Mintzers on account of the train breaking in two. Immediately after coming to a stop, the rear end of the train was struck by extra 1543.

Northbound freight train extra 1543 consisted of 61 cars and caboose, hauled by engine 1543, and was in charge of Conductor Rickards and Engineman Wesner, it was being assisted by helper engines 1556 and 1589, which were coupled to the rear end. Extra 1543 had overtaken extra 1629, and after assisting it up the grade had uncoupled from it and was gradually dropping back when extra 1629 came to a sudden stop, having broken in two, and the

engineman of extra 1543 did not have an opportunity of stopping his train before it collided with extra 1629.

Engine 1543 overturned to the right of the track; the tender was not derailed. The rear car of extra 1629 was demolished, the next car entirely derailed, and two other cars partly derailed. The employee killed was the head brakeman of extra 1543.

#### Summary of evidence.

Conductor Wagner, of extra 1629, stated that shortly after leaving Tamaqua the train parted between the fifth and sixth cars back of the engine, the air brakes going into emergency and bringing the train to a sudden stop. Upon investigation he found that the drawhead on the sixth car was a little low, and after coupling these two cars, the train started, but parted again in the same place. He decided to take these first six cars ahead to Mintzers siding, which was done. He returned with the engines and coupled to the remaining portion of his train and started, intending to back this portion of the train in at the north end of Mintzers siding. He stated that the train had not moved very far when it again parted, between what were now the second and third cars from the engine, he started ahead to investigate and had reached a point about midway of his train when it started again, and he had just boarded the train when he felt the force of the collision in the rear. Engineman Scott, of extra 1629, corroborated the statements of Conductor Wagner.

Engineman Wesner, of extra 1543, stated that his train left Tamaqua at about 2.45 p.m., and was stopped by an automatic signal at the north end of the yard at Tamaqua, he was again stopped a short distance farther on by a flagman who was protecting the rear of a train ahead. After a delay of about 45 minutes the train ahead proceeded and he followed slowly behind as far as the block signal at Tamaqua tunnel, after receiving a clear indication, his train proceeded through the tunnel and was again flagged, drifting until he finally stopped about a car-length from the rear of the preceding train. He stated that as the train ahead started to move, he signalled the enginemen of the pusher engines on the rear of his train to proceed and he moved his train up to and coupled on to extra 1629, at about this time Conductor Rickards reached the engine and said not to block the passage between the station and train No. 10, which was then about due at Mintzers, and after assisting extra 1629 up the hill for a distance of about 1/4 mile his train was uncoupled by the head brakeman, just after which extra 1629 suddenly stopped. He applied the air brakes in emergency, but could not prevent the collision. Engineman Wesner stated that his purpose

in assisting at this particular place without cutting off his engine from his own train was because the rear of his train and the pusher engines were in Tamaqua tunnel and he wanted to move them out into the open as soon as possible. Conductor Rickards made practically the same statements as Engineman Wesner, except that he said extra 1629 had started to move and that his own train did not come to a full stop before coupling to the rear of extra 1629 to assist it up the hill.

Car Shop Foreman Leidinger stated that trains passing through Tamaqua on the main track do not receive a close inspection. The inspectors go over the train to see if any of the brake rigging is dragging or if there are any leaks in the train line, if no defects are found, the yardmaster is notified that the train is in condition to proceed. This procedure is known as a main-track inspection, and trains are not held or delayed to make it.

Foreman Car Inspector Moyer stated that after extra 1629 arrived at Tamaqua yard, the inspectors had only inspected three cars when the train left. On the day following the accident, he examined the couplers involved, but did not find any defects which would have caused them to part if they had been properly coupled, and he said they were within the requirements of the statutes regulating the height of couplers on standard gauge cars. He did not know whether any repairs had been made prior to the time of his inspection.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by extra 1629 breaking in two, resulting in the air brakes being applied in emergency and stopping the train so suddenly that there was no opportunity of stopping extra 1543, which at the time was separated from it by only a few feet.

The majority of the employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident the crew of extra 1543 had been on duty about 2 hours and the crew of extra 1629 about 13 hours, previous to which these employees had been off duty from 13 to 64 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Chief, Bureau of Safety.