

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE PIEDMONT & NORTHERN RAILWAY AT BUNCOMBE,
S. C., ON AUGUST 11, 1928.

October 22, 1928.

To the Commission:

On August 11, 1928, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Piedmont & Northern Railway at Buncombe, S. C., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 1 employee and 20 passengers.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the South Carolina Division which extends between Greenwood and Spartanburg, S. C., a distance of 89 miles. This is a single-track electric line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. This accident occurred at a point about 1,687 feet north of Buncombe Street, approaching this point from the south, beginning at Buncombe Street, the track is tangent for a distance of 550 feet, followed by a 2° curve to the right 276.7 feet in length, 675.9 feet of tangent, and then a 6° curve to the left 535.1 feet in length, the accident occurring on this last-mentioned curve about 185 feet from its southern end. Approaching from the north the track is tangent for a considerable distance, followed by the curve in which the accident occurred. The grade in this vicinity is generally ascending for northbound trains, being about 0.92% at the point of accident. The range of vision on the 6° curve is restricted to about 550 feet, due to large trees on the inside of the curve.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.24 p. m.

Description

Northbound passenger train No. 8 consisted of motor coach 2107, of all-steel construction, and combination express and passenger coach 2006, of semi-steel under-frame construction, and was in charge of Conductor Bailey and Motorman Vaughn. This train departed from Greenwood, S. C., at 1.15 p.m., on time, registered out of River

Junction, the last open office, at 3.21 p.m., one minute late, and collided with southbound extra 5501 at Buncombe, at a point about 1 mile from River Junction, while traveling at a speed of about 30 miles per hour.

Southbound freight train extra 5501 consisted of motor 5501, of steel-underframe construction, and five box cars, and was in charge of Conductor Adams and Motorman Bull. This train left Taylors, the last open office, at 3 p.m., without any orders relating to train No. 6, and collided with that train just north of Buncombe while traveling at a speed of about 5 miles per hour.

Motor 2107 overrode the underframe of motor 5501 and telescoped that car a distance of 28 feet, while combination car 2006 rode over the underframe at the rear end of motor 2107, resulting in the forward end of coach 2006 being telescoped a distance of 6 feet. Both motors were badly damaged by fire which broke out in the wreckage. The employee killed was the motorman of train No. 6.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Bailey, of train No. 6, stated that his train departed from River Junction at 3.21 p.m., one minute late, came practically to a stop at Buncombe Street, and shortly afterwards as he was passing through the first car he felt an application of the brakes; he turned around and saw the opposing train, the collision occurring immediately afterwards, at which time his train was traveling at a speed of about 30 miles per hour. The conductor said he was thrown to one end of the car and that as soon as he arose he looked at his watch and it was 3.25 p.m. After rendering what assistance he could to the passengers he met Motorman Bull, of extra 5501, and asked him if he had a meet order with his train and Motorman Bull took out his watch, which showed 3.21 p.m., while Conductor Bailey's watch showed the time as 3.35 p.m. Conductor Bailey further stated that he had complied with the watch inspection rules and that just before leaving Greenwood he compared his watch with Motorman Vaughn's watch and there was a variation of 10 seconds between the two watches.

Conductor Adams, of extra 5501, stated that he was operating a turn-around run, extending from River Junction to Taylors and return, doing local work and switching between these points. While doing some switching at Taylors he broke the crystal of his watch and when ready to depart on the return trip he told the operator at Taylors that the crystal was broken and asked him at what time he was going to show extra 5501 as departing, the operator replying that

he would show the departing time as 3 p.m. Upon getting into motor 5501 he also told Motorman Bull he had broken his watch and that they were being shown as leaving at 3 p. m., the motorman in reply telling him it was only 2.57 p.m. There was a car to be picked up at Worsted Mill and he thought his train would be able to do this work and get in at the north end of the No. 2 track at Buncombe for train No. 6; this track, however, actually is located within the yard limits of River Junction. They proceeded to Worsted Mill, picked up the car, and just before passing News, 2.3 miles from River Junction, he inquired as to the time; the motorman's watch read 3.14 p.m. and they decided to proceed to No. 2 track. While rounding the curve on which the accident occurred, moving at a speed of 30 miles per hour, he saw train No. 6 about 350 or 450 feet distant and called a warning to Motorman Bull, Motorman Bull applied the brakes and the speed had been reduced to about 5 miles per hour when the conductor jumped just before the collision occurred. About one minute afterwards, upon meeting Conductor Bailey, Conductor Adams inquired as to the time and Conductor Bailey's watch showed it to be 3.25 p.m., as did also Flagman Greer's, but Motorman Bull's watch still showed it to be 3.14 p. m. At a later time Conductor Adams again looked at Motorman Bull's watch and it was then 3.30 p.m. Conductor Adams further stated that he had figured on the time leaving Taylors as 2.57 p.m. and thought his train would be into clear on No. 2 track at 3.20 p.m., apparently being of the impression that since no time was shown at this particular siding he was governed by rule 40-A, which provides that when a train turns out at a siding where no time is shown it must clear the time of the superior train as shown at the first station ahead, instead of being governed by the rule requiring inferior trains to clear the time of opposing superior trains at least five minutes. It also appeared from his statements that he had complied with the requirements as to watch inspection and comparison, and had compared watches with all the members of his crew on the morning of the accident, and he said he had always found Motorman Bull's watch more nearly correct than any of the others.

Motorman Bull, of extra 5501, stated that his train departed from Taylors at 2.57 p.m., according to his watch, although Conductor Adams stated that they were registered out of there at 3 p.m. His watch showed 3.03 p.m. when they stopped at Worsted Mill siding to pick up a car. He then proceeded and when a short distance north of News, Conductor Adams asked him as to the time and his watch then showed 3.14 p.m. He said he then discussed the time with Conductor Adams and they thought they would be able to be

into clear at No. 2 track by 3.18 p.m., allowing three minutes for running time and one minute for clearing the main track. He was running at a speed of from 30 to 35 miles per hour and when approaching the curve he heard Conductor Adams call to him and saw train No. 6 approaching. He then applied the brakes, reducing the speed to about 5 miles per hour by the time he jumped off the train. Upon looking at his watch shortly after the collision it still showed the time as 3.14 p.m. This was the first knowledge he had that his watch had stopped; he then started it and later compared time with Conductor Bailey, at which time his watch was 10 minutes slow. Motorman Bull thought rule 40-A, previously mentioned, was sufficient authority for attempting to move his train to no. 2 track and be into clear by 3.18 p.m., two minutes before train No. 6 is due out of River Junction, and he did not think he should have been governed by the rule requiring that at meeting points between trains of different classes the inferior train must clear the superior train at least five minutes. Motorman Bull further stated that his watch had run down on two or three previous occasions, he did not remember when he had last wound it prior to the occurrence of this accident, but said it had been inspected regularly and that he left the question of cleaning the watch to the judgment of the watch inspector. He denied that he and the conductor had forgotten train No. 6.

The testimony of Flagman Greer brought out nothing additional of importance due to his inexperience and his inability to remember the time at various points where he looked at his watch. He did remember that in approaching News he was asked about train No. 6 by Brakeman Teasley, and he said he did not look at his watch then but knew it was time for train No. 6 to leave River Junction. At another point in his statements, however, he said his train left News at 3.13 or 3.14 p.m.

Brakeman Teasley stated that he looked at his watch upon leaving Taylors and it was 3.03 p.m., and after picking up the car at Worsted Mill it was 3.14 p.m. When he saw that the train was passing News he inquired of Flagman Greer if train No. 6 was late, as it was then 3.22 p.m., and as Flagman Greer could give him no information, he said he was going to find out, but the accident occurred before he could talk with the conductor.

Randall Edwards, employed as trolley holder, said that it was 3.03 p.m. by his watch when they left Taylors. He did not look at the time again until after the accident, but he spoke to Brakeman Teasley when approaching News and said he thought they were going to head in at that point.