

## 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 NEAR SAVONA  
MILL, CHARLOTTE, N. C., ON JULY 29, 1924.

August 13, 1924.

To the Commission:

On July 29, 1924, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Piedmont & Northern Railway near Savona Mill, Charlotte, N. C., resulting in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 4 employees and 11 passengers.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the North Carolina Division, extending between Charlotte and Gastonia, N. C., a distance of 23.5 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident 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. Time-table direction is used in this report. The accident occurred at a point about 1,500 feet south of what is known as Savona Mill; approaching this point from the south there is a  $30^{\circ} 34'$  curve to the right 1,354 feet in length, then 139 feet of tangent, followed by a  $60^{\circ} 43'$  curve to the left 719 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 63 feet from its southern end. Approaching from the north there are 278 feet of tangent, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is about 1.5 per cent descending for northbound trains. The view of the point of accident is obstructed by a dense woods on both sides of the track. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.08 p.m.

Description

Southbound passenger train No. 7 consisted of motor car 2004, and was in charge of Conductor Trott and Motorman Freeman. At Charlotte the crew received copy of train order No. 9, Form 31, reading as follows:

"Motor 5003 run exa Pinoca to Charlotte  
& meet No Seven 7 car 2004 at Erwins  
Creek crossover Charlotte."

This train left Charlotte at 1 p.m., on time, passed Erwins Creek crossover, the meeting point established by the train order, and on reaching a point about 1.1 miles beyond while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour collided with extra 5003.

Northbound freight train extra 5003 consisted of 10 loaded cars, hauled by electric locomotive 5003, and was in charge of Conductor Dodgen and Motorman Williamson. At Pinoca, 4.5 miles from Charlotte, the crew received copy of train order No. 9, previously quoted. This train left Pinoca at 12.52 p.m., and just before reaching Savona Mill while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 8 or 10 miles an hour collided with train No. 7.

The force of the impact drove motor car 2004 backward a distance of about 190 feet; it came to rest upright and partly derailed, the forward end being demolished and its interior badly damaged. Electric locomotive 5003 came to rest with its head end penetrating the forward vestibule of motor car 2004, and its forward truck derailed; it was only slightly damaged. With the exception of the rear pair of wheels of the forward truck of the first car, none of the other equipment in extra 5003 was derailed. The employee killed was the motorman of the passenger train.

#### Summary of evidence

Motorman Williamson, of extra 5003, stated that the first knowledge he had of anything wrong was on seeing train No. 7 rounding the curve in the woods about 300 feet away, at which time his train was traveling at a speed of between 12 and 15 miles an hour down the hill. He immediately applied the air brakes in emergency and placed the motor in reverse, reducing the speed to about 8 miles an hour at the time of the accident. He further stated that after starting to descend the hill, the crest of which is only a short distance south of the point of accident, he shut off power, and on reaching a point about 10 car-lengths south of the point of collision he made an application of the air brakes, reducing speed in order to negotiate the curve, then held the brakes applied by placing the brake valve in the lap position, and when train No. 7 came into view he moved the brake valve from this position to emergency. The air brakes were tested and worked properly. The testimony of Conductor Dodgen, who was riding on the locomotive at the time of the accident, practically corroborated that of Motorman Williamson; he estimated the speed of his train to have been about 15 or 18 miles an hour when train No. 7 came into

view, and about 8 or 10 miles an hour at the time of the collision, at which time he thought train No. 7 was traveling up the hill at a speed of about 20 miles an hour.

Dispatcher Miller, on duty at Charlotte, stated that he delivered copy of train order No. 9 to Conductor Trott, of train No. 7, and that the conductor read the order in his presence; also that when he delivered this order he particularly called the conductor's attention to the meet at Erwins Creek crossover, located between 1/4 and 1/2 mile from the dispatcher's office, telling him to wait at that point for extra 5003, and that it would be there at about 1.05 p.m., to which Conductor Trott replied that he would meet that train as specified. Dispatcher Miller further stated that this is the customary meeting point between northbound freight trains and southbound passenger trains, and that shortly after 8 a.m. the day of the accident he arranged a similar meet at this point for Conductor Trott and Motorman Freeman, and that order was properly executed.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of train No. 7 to obey a train order establishing a meeting point, for which Conductor Trott and Motorman Freeman are responsible.

As a result of the accident Motorman Freeman was killed, while Conductor Trott was injured to such an extent that no statement was obtained from him. However, after the accident a copy of train order No. 9 was found in one of the pockets of Motorman Freeman's clothes. In view of the fact that Erwins Creek crossover is the customary meeting point for northbound freight trains and southbound passenger trains, the trains involved being similar trains, and that these employees had properly executed a similar meet order at this point in the morning of the day of the accident, no explanation as to the reason for their failure in this instance can be advanced.

Had an adequate block signal system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred; an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

All of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 7 had been on duty less than 7 hours, and the crew of extra 5003 less than 5½ hours, prior to which they had been off duty 14 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,  
W. P. BORLAND  
Director