

October 2, 1912.

Inv-82

In re Investigation of Accident on the Rutland  
Railroad, near Bennington, Vt., Sept. 7, 1912.

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On September 7, 1912, there was a head-end collision, between a south-bound milk train and a north-bound passenger train, on the Rutland Railroad, near Bennington, Vt., resulting in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 11 passengers, 6 employees and 1 express messenger.

After investigation, I beg to submit the following report:

The milk train involved in this collision was first-class train No. 88, running from Alburgh, N. Y., to Chatham, N. Y. It consisted of engine No. 2044, 7 milk cars and a coach, and was in charge of Conductor Asble and Engineman Wardwell. This train was late in arriving at Rutland. There order 231 was issued, reading as follows: "No. eighty-eight (88) run forty (40) minutes late Rutland to Bennington." Before this order was signed, however, it was annulled by order 233 which read: "Order two thirty one (231) is annulled. No. eight-eight (88) run one (1) hour late Rutland to Bennington." This order was signed by Conductor Asble and made complete at 5:23 p. m. Train No. 88 left Rutland at 5:36 p. m., one hour and eight minutes late, arriving at North Bennington at 7:35 p. m., one hour and thirty-five minutes late. At North Bennington this

train received order No. 238 which did not concern this train but was to be carried to Bennington and there delivered to train No. 371, there being no operator on duty at Bennington at that time. Train No. 88 left North Bennington at 7:37 p. m., one hour and thirty-seven minutes late, and at 7:50 p. m., while running at a speed of approximately 30 miles per hour, this train collided with train no. 371.

Northbound passenger train No. 371 consisted of engine No. 798, one coach, one combination baggage and smoking car, and a baggage car. It was in charge of Conductor Shufelt and Engineman Gekkey. This train left Bennington at 7:45 p. m., on time, without orders against No. 88 which was a superior train by direction and which was at that time over-due one hour and thirty minutes. After proceeding about half a mile, train No. 371 collided with train No. 88.

The distance from Bennington to North Bennington is 4.5 miles. Between these points the Rutland Railroad is a single-track line and is operated by the train order system. The collision occurred on a ten-foot fill, about half a mile north of Bennington passenger station, on a two degree curve and a grade of .83 per cent descending toward the north. Beginning about 900 feet south of the point where the accident occurred, the track is straight to Bennington passenger station, and beginning

about 700 feet north of the point where the collision occurred the track is straight for 3000 feet. At the point where the collision occurred, however, the view is obstructed by trees on the property adjoining the right-of-way on the east.

A timetable rule provides that trains will not leave Bennington without train order or clearance card, authorized by the assistant superintendent; when the station is closed for the night, however, this rule is not in effect. There was no operator on duty at Bennington when No. 371 departed, the office being closed from 6:20 p. m. until 7:00 a. m., and it was therefore unnecessary for train No. 371 to secure a clearance card before leaving. Had there been an operator on duty at Bennington it is probable that this accident would have been averted.

Bennington is the starting point or terminal of train 371, and a train register is kept there, but neither Conductor Shufelt nor engineman Cokey checked this register before the departure of train 371 to see if all overdue superior class trains had arrived. Conductor Shufelt, however, had checked the register on a previous trip, only a short time before, and knew that train No. 88 was overdue, and had not at that time arrived. He admitted that he had forgotten all about this train.

Baggageman Slattery of train No. 371 had also read order No. 233, stating that No. 88 would run one hour late, but he also admitted that he had forgotten train No. 88. This collision occurred during Engineman Cokey's first trip

In this service on that date and he did not see order No. 233. But Engineman Sibley, whom Engineman Gokey relieved, stated that he told Engineman Gokey No. 88 had not arrived, and that the latter replied "All right". Engineman Gokey was killed.

This collision was caused by failure of the crew of train No. 371 to remember and to keep their train clear of train No. 88. But an accident of this character was rendered possible by the method of operating trains under the train order system which was employed on this road. Numerous accidents of this character have been investigated during the past year, due to the failure of men under the train order system to observe or obey train orders or to keep their trains clear of superior trains. Because of the inherent weaknesses of the train order system, the only real and permanent preventive of such accidents is the adoption of some adequate form of block system. In the absence of a block system, a proper regard for the safety of train movement would seem to require the presence of an operator at Bennington both day and night.

Conductor Shufelt entered the service of the Rutland Railroad Company in 1890, and he had been employed as a conductor since 1895. Engineman Gokey entered the service of this company in 1905, and he had been employed as an engineman since October 7, 1910. Baggage-master Slattery entered the service of this company in 1901. All of these men had been examined on the rules since June 1, 1909, and all had good records. None of them had been on duty in excess of the period permitted by the hours of service law.