

March 28, 1916.

In re Investigation of an accident which
occurred on the Seaboard Air Line
Railway at Franklinton, N. C.,
on February 15, 1916.

On February 15, 1916, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a freight engine on the Seaboard Air Line Railway at Franklinton, N. C., which resulted in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 38 passengers and 4 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

The Raleigh District of the Virginia Division of this railway, on which this accident occurred, is a single-track line, extending between Raleigh, N. C., and Norfolk, N. C. Train movements are governed by train orders, timetable and manual block signal system.

Northbound freight train 2nd No. 72 consisted of 77 cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotives 334 and 311, and was in charge of Conductor Williams and Engineers Eisenhart and Harris. This train left Johnson Street yard, Raleigh, N. C., at 9:50 p.m., February 14th, and arrived at Franklinton, N. C. at 10:20 a.m., February 15th. At Franklinton there are two passing tracks, one having a capacity of 61 cars and the other a capacity of 48 cars, the south switches of both being located a short distance south of the station. When train 2nd No. 72 arrived at that point, locomotive 334 was detached

from the train and locomotive 311 with 50 cars pulled in on one of the passing tracks. Locomotive 234 then backed onto the remainder of the train and pulled into the other passing track, clearing the main track at 12.55 a.m. At 1.45 a.m., after an overdue passenger train had passed, locomotive 234 engaged in switching until 2.05 a.m. Locomotive 311 remained on the on the passing track until about 4.15 a.m., when it was brought out on the main track for the purpose of transferring it to the other passing track. While engaged in making this movement it was struck by northbound passenger train No. 10, at about 4.31 a.m.

Northbound passenger train No. 10, en route from Miami, Fla., to New York, N. Y., and known as the "Florida Limited," consisted of 9 all-steel cars, hauled by locomotive 103, and was in charge of Conductor Welsh and Engineman Yelle. It left Johnson Street, Raleigh, N. C., at 3.40 a.m., 25 minutes late, with an order to run 20 minutes late to Norfolk, passed Franklinton at 4.20 a.m., 20 minutes late, and collided with locomotive 311 about 3,100 feet north of Franklinton station while running at a speed of 45 or 50 miles an hour.

The collision forced the rear of the tender of locomotive 311 and the front end of locomotive 103 to the left of the track, overturning three freight cars standing on the west passing track. Locomotive 311 was forced loose from its tender and continued northward on the track for a distance of several hundred feet, while its tender came to

rest in an upright position on the roadbed in a badly damaged condition about 335 feet north of the point of collision. Locomotive 103 and its tender, which was jammed tightly against the boiler-head, came to rest partly on their right side and were buried quite deeply in the roadbed about 15 feet from the rear of the tender of locomotive 311. Both the engineer and fireman of locomotive 103 were killed, the former being scalded to death and the latter being crushed between the engine and tender. The first three cars in train No. 10 were derailed and sustained considerable damage, the first two being torn from their trucks. The remaining six cars in the train received no damage other than broken panels of glass.

Approaching the scene of the accident and passing through Franklinton, the track is straight, running almost due north and south. At a point 700 feet north of the station is the beginning of a 2-degree curve to the left, 1,200 feet in length, which is followed by tangent track to the point of collision, 1,300 feet beyond the end of this curve. The grade is slightly descending for northbound trains. The weather at the time of the accident was clear and cold.

Engineer Harris, of locomotive 311, stated that when his train arrived at Franklinton, locomotive 834 was uncoupled from the train and proceeded on the main track until it was clear of the south switch of the west or southbound passing track, and that he then pulled 50 cars into that passing track at about 12.35 a.m. He stated that his part of the train remained there until a few minutes after 4.00

o'clock, when the colored brakeman brought him a message stating that the crew of his train, with the exception of the crew of locomotive 634, were to deadhead to Portsmouth, Va. on train 1st No. 9. Engineman Harris further stated that after he had read this message the brakeman said that he had been instructed by the conductor to tell him to bring his engine back to the east or northbound passing track. Engineman Harris stated that he then looked at his watch and told the brakeman that he could not make that move and clear train No. 10, as that train was due at Franklinton at 4.10 a.m., and that the brakeman then told him that the conductor said he would "hold everything" until he reached there. He stated that it was 4.12 a.m. when he brought his engine out onto the main track and started back toward the north switch of the east passing track about 2,000 feet distant. When his engine had gone back about 15 car lengths he saw the reflection of the electric headlight of train No. 10 on the cars on the east passing track as it was rounding the curve, and he immediately shut off steam and applied the brakes. He shouted to his fireman that the approaching train had not been flagged, at the same time reversing his engine. He stated that his fireman then lighted a fusee and gave it to the brakeman, but did not know what the latter did with it. His engine was moving ahead when train No. 10 rounded the curve at high speed, the collision occurring an instant later. He stated that there was a rule providing that when a block has once

been cleared it cannot be entered without permission from the dispatcher, and that his train received no written order authorizing the movement being made in this instance, but that it was customary to make such movements without written orders, if protected by a flagman, and that it had been done many times. Engineman Harris stated that he had not been asleep at any time while his train was on the passing track on the morning of the accident, that he had seen three trains pass in that time, and that he knew train No. 10 had not passed. He further stated that he had always considered colored brakemen reliable in delivering verbal instructions and that when the brakeman in this instance told him to go back to the east passing track with his engine and that the movement would be protected by the conductor holding everything until he got there, he did not for a moment doubt the exactness or veracity of his instructions.

Conductor Williams, of train No. 72, stated that his train arrived at Franklinton at 12.20 a.m., coming to a stop at the south switch of the southbound passing track. The leading locomotive, No. 634, was then uncoupled and locomotive No. 311, with 50 cars, pulled in on the southbound passing track. Locomotive 634 then coupled onto the rest of the train and pulled in on the northbound passing track. He stated that at 1.45 a.m., a northbound passenger train passed Franklinton, after which he set out several defective cars on the rear part of the train, having first told the operator

that he was going to do so. Conductor Williams stated that prior to setting out these cars the operator had not given him any orders or clearance card to permit him to occupy the main track, and said that it was not necessary to obtain the permission of the operator for the purpose of setting out cars, and that such a method of procedure was customary when no superior trains were due. Locomotive 834 was used in these shifting operations, that work being completed at 2.05 a.m., when he notified the operator that his entire train was into clear. He said that he then received an order stating that a southbound extra passenger train was approaching, being due at Kittrell, the first station north, at 2.37 a.m. Train No. 9, a southbound passenger train passed Franklinton about 3.00 a.m., and the extra passed about 3.25 a.m. He stated that his train remained on the passing tracks after the latter train had passed, as there was not sufficient time in which to get out for train No. 10. He stated that he was in the telegraph office when each of the southbound trains passed, and remained there until about 4.05 a.m., when he was given a message instructing the crew of his train, with the exception of the crew of locomotive 834, to deadhead to Portsmouth on train 1st No. 8, which was due about two hours later. He stated that at this time train No. 10 was entering the block at Wake Forest, 10.3 miles south of Franklinton. He immediately went into his caboose, and the following is the statement of Conductor Williams concerning the instructions which he gave his

brakeman, who was in the caboose:

"I told him what our instructions were; that No. 10 was in the block, and that I wanted him to go down and tie the brakes on those cars; and as soon as No. 10 passed to take 311 and couple ahead of 834 so the engine crew on 834 could watch the engine, as we had to deadhead to Portsmouth. He made a slow move in getting around. I told him No. 10 was in the block and to go ahead and tie the brakes and tell the engineer as soon as No. 10 passed to come back and couple ahead of 834. He left the caboose and got about one car length from the caboose. I went to the door and called him, called him by his name, 'Tom, you understand that No. 10 is to run before you come out.' He said he understood and repeated it after me."

Conductor Williams said that he heard train No. 10 approaching Franklinton, and that he was in his caboose when that train passed, at 4.30 a.m., at a speed of about 50 miles an hour, and that he heard the noise of the collision. He stated that after the collision he asked the engineer of locomotive 311 what the brakeman had told him, the engineer replying that the brakeman had told him that the conductor "was going to hold everything until he got back down into clear." Conductor Williams stated that he gave the brakeman no such instructions. He said that after the accident he asked the brakeman what he had told the engineer, and he replied that he had told him that train No. 10 had not passed and to bring the engine back as soon as that train did pass. Conductor Williams further stated that there was no reason why he could not have personally delivered the message to the engineer, but that he did not think it necessary and that it was customary to have

brakemen deliver such messages. He also stated that as far as he knew, the brakeman was reliable, that he was familiar with the movement of trains, but that he did not think he had been examined on the book of rules.

Flagman Wheeler, of train 2nd No. 72, stated that he awakened Brakeman Rowlett when the conductor came to the caboose with the message and instructions to be delivered to the engineer. He corroborated the statement of Conductor Williams as to the instructions given the brakeman at that time.

Colored Brakeman Rowlett, of train 2nd No. 72, stated that when the conductor returned to the caboose from the telegraph office he gave him a message for the engineer, in regard to deadheading to Portsmouth, and also instructed him to tell the engineer that he was to wait until train No. 10 had passed and then bring his engine back and couple it to locomotive 354 on the northbound passing track. He stated that when he reached the head end of the train he set the brakes on three cars, uncoupled locomotive 311, got up on the engine end, finding the engineer asleep, awakened him and gave him the message. He said the engineer then read the message, looked at his watch and time-card and said: "Let's go," and, thinking the engineer had some reason for believing it to be safe to go out on the main track, he opened the switch and locomotive 311 was brought out on the main

track. At one point in his testimony, Brakeman Rowlett stated that he told Engineman Harris to wait until train No. 10 passed, and at another point that he said nothing to him about it; at one point he stated that the engineman asked him if train No. 10 has passed, and at another that he had not done so; at one point he stated that Conductor Williams told him to tell the engineman to wait until train No. 10 passed, at another that the only instructions the conductor gave him about that train were to the effect that it would pass by the time he reached locomotive 311, while at another point he stated that after getting up on the engine and beginning to talk he completely forgot train No. 10. Brakeman Rowlett further stated that he is unable to read or write, that he had never been examined on the book of rules, had never been given any flagging instructions, and that he learned to be a brakeman by watching other brakemen perform their duties. He stated that he was asleep in the caboose during part of the time that his train was on the passing track, but that he was awake when Conductor Williams gave him the message and instructions for Engineman Harris.

Colored Fireman Barnes, of locomotive 311, stated that neither he nor Engineman Harris were asleep at any time on the morning of the accident. He said that when the brakeman came up on the engine he told Engineman Harris that he had uncoupled the engine, handed him a message and told him that the conductor wanted him to bring the engine back on the

main line and place it on the other passing track. He stated that Engineman Harris asked the brakeman whether train No. 10 has passed and the latter replied that the conductor "would look out for everything," threw the switch and signaled his engineman out on to the main track. Fireman Barnes stated that after starting back someone shouted "Lookout; give me a fuse!", that he lighted one, handed it to the brakeman, and an instant later was rendered unconscious by the force of the collision. He said his engine was reversed when the collision occurred.

Conductor Walsh, of train No. 10, stated that approaching Franklinton he heard his engineman whistle for the train order signal and went to the door of the baggage car and looked for the signal. He saw that it had not gone to the clear position and felt the brakes being applied, the speed being reduced to about 30 miles per hour. He stated that when his train had nearly reached the station the signal went to the clear position and the train again gathered speed. He further stated that at the time of collision the speed of his train was about 45 miles an hour, no application of the brakes having been made.

The Rules and Regulations of the Operating Department of this railway provide as follows:

"66. An inferior train must clear the line of a superior train, in the same direction, not less than five minutes; but must be clear at the time a first-class train, in the same direction, is due to leave the next station in the rear where time is shown."

"97. A train failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule, must be protected as prescribed by Rule 98."

"113. Trains of an inferior class must not occupy the main line in any block when a train of a superior class is due to leave the first station ahead or in the rear."

"131. A train having cleared a block and having been so reported must not re-enter such block except under protection by flag, as required by General Rule No. 99."

In this instance none of these rules was observed.

The direct cause of this accident was locomotive 311 occupying the main track on the time of a superior first-class train without authority or proper protection, for which Conductor Williams and Engineman Harris are responsible.

A contributing cause was the failure to Colored Brakeman Rowlett to deliver properly to Engineman Harris the instructions entrusted to him by Conductor Williams. The statements of the employees involved are conflicting, but the statement of the engineman is corroborated by that of the fireman, and the statement of the conductor is corroborated by that of his flagman, while the statements of the colored brakeman are very conflicting and contradictory. It is apparent, however, that this locomotive was permitted to occupy the main track because of the failure of the brakeman properly to deliver to the engineman the instructions received by him from the conductor. Safety in train operation demands the services of competent men, yet in this investigation it was developed that a colored brakeman, unable to read or write,

who had never been examined on the book of rules, and who had never been given any instructions as to the proper manner in which to perform his duties, was entrusted by the conductor in charge of this train with an important message for delivery to the engineer, and was given directions that necessitated the use of the main track; and no arrangements were made to provide proper protection for such movement. The engineer accepted the statement of the colored brakeman and, on the strength of it, occupied the main track without knowing whether or not proper protection was provided.

Such movements are in direct violation of Rule 108, which provides that:

"Both conductors and engineers are responsible for the safety of their trains, and, under conditions not provided for by the rules, must take every precaution for their protection."

Under such circumstances it does not seem unreasonable that the responsible white employees in charge of this train, if they expect to take the word of colored employees and occupy the main track without proper protection, must assume full responsibility for such movements.

Conductor Williams entered the employ of this railway as flagman December 22, 1906, was promoted to conductor January 3, 1909, and had a good record. Engineer Harris entered the service as fireman March 3, 1902, was dismissed March 14, 1905, re-employed as fireman February 8, 1906, promoted to engineer November 4, 1907, dismissed September 8,

1913, for responsibility in connection with a head-end collision, and was reinstated December 10, 1913.

At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 72 had been on duty 6 hours and 50 minutes; the train crew of train No. 10 had been on duty 6 hours and 45 minutes and the engine crew 1 hour and 35 minutes.