

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
SOUTHERN RAILWAY AT POYTHRESS, ALA , ON NOVEMBER 24, 1920.

February 17, 1921.

On November 24, 1920, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Southern Railway at Poythress, Ala., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 1 employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on that part of the Mobile Division extending between York and North Selma, Ala., which is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. Approaching the point of accident from either direction the track is straight for a distance of approximately 2 miles and the grade is slightly ascending for northbound trains. At Poythress there is a spur track on the west side of the main line, the switch being a trailing-point switch for northbound trains. In the vicinity of the point of accident the track is laid with 65-pound rails, 30 feet in length, single-spiked, with 17 pine and oak ties to the rail, and is ballasted with from 6 to 12 inches of slag and cinders. The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

Northbound freight train No. 58, consisting of engine 284, 23 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Griffith and Engineman Tipton, left Meridian, Miss., at 3.30 p.m., passed York, 19 miles south of Poythress and the last open telegraph station south of the point of accident, at about

5.20 p.m., and at about 6.30 p.m. was derailed by striking a bull at a point 107 feet north of mile post 252.4, about $\frac{3}{4}$ miles south of Poythress, while travelling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour.

Investigation developed that the pony truck wheels were the first to derail and that they continued along the ties, to the right of the rails, until they reached the frog of the switch at Poythress, a distance of 4,113 feet north of the initial point of derailment. At this point the engine derailed, turned over and came to rest on its right side with its front end about 199 feet north of the frog of the switch. Several cars were derailed and more or less damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

Head Brakeman Moore, who was riding on the engine, knew nothing about its having struck an obstruction and said that the engineman had not reduced speed or sounded the cattle alarm. He said the engine was using steam when it was entirely derailed at the switch. Conductor Griffith, who was riding in the caboose, saw fire flying from the head end of the train just before he felt the shock of the derailment. Both Conductor Griffith and Flagman Adams, who had also been riding in the caboose, said that the marks on the ties south of the switch were very faint, indicating that very little weight had been resting on the derailed pony truck wheels. Flagman Adams found the body of the bull and he said that there were wheel marks on the ties throughout the entire distance between where the bull was found and where the en-

gine overturned. All of these employees estimated the speed of the train to have been about 20 miles an hour and none of them noticed any application of the brakes either in the vicinity of where the bull was struck or after passing that point.

The construction of the engine was such that when the pony truck dropped about 4 inches all of the weight came on the driving wheels and it is probable that this prevented the engineman from knowing that the pony truck wheels had been derailed, while examination of the marks on the ties showed that they had not been severed enough to break any of the ties.

This accident was caused by the engine of train No. 58 striking a bull, resulting in the derailment of the pony truck wheels and the subsequent derailment of the train.

The evidence indicates that none of the members of the crew riding on the engine was aware that the bull had been struck, or that the pony truck wheels had been derailed, and that the engineman continued to work steam until the engine was entirely derailed at the switch more than 4,000 feet beyond the point where the bull was struck.

The members of the crew were experienced men and none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service laws.