

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ST. LOUIS-SAN FRANCISCO RAILWAY AT GIRARD, KANS., ON APRIL 25, 1922.

May 29, 1922.

To the Commission:

On April 25, 1922, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a circus train on the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway at Girard, Kans., resulting in the death of 1 passenger, and the injury of 12 passengers and 2 employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Afton Sub-Division of the Northern Division, extending between Edward, Kans., and Afton, Okla., a distance of 84.1 miles, which in the vicinity of the point of accident is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred within yard limits, approximately 1250 feet north of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Crossing; approaching this point from the north, beginning at a point 1 mile distant, the track is tangent, and the grade undulating, being 0.13 per cent ascending for southbound trains in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident. The weather was foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 2.37 a. m.

Description.

Southbound extra 1290 consisted of 18 circus cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1290, and was in charge of Conductor Mertz and Engineman Mathewson. This train passed Edward, 21.8 miles from Girard, at 1.20 a. m., made a stop at the stop board just north of the crossing at Girard, and had started to move over the crossing, intending to enter a siding and was traveling at an estimated speed of 8 miles an hour when the rear end was struck by train No. 111.

Southbound passenger train No. 111 consisted of 1 mail car, 1 baggage car, 1 combination car, 1 coach, 1 chair car, and 3 Pullman sleeping cars, of all-steel construction, in the order named, hauled by engine 1050, and was in charge of Conductor Taylor and Engineman Chatty. This train passed Edward at 2.07 a. m., 2 minutes late, and collided with the circus train while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles an hour

None of the equipment in either train was derailed, but the circus train broke in two and the rear car was tele-scoped by the caboose for a distance of about 10 feet.

Summary of evidence.

Before leaving the initial terminal, the crew of the circus train received orders limiting its speed to 25 miles an hour, and Assistant Superintendent Carson was instructed to ride on the train as a matter of extra precaution. Under rule 86, an inferior train must be clear of the main track 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. According to members of the crew, extra 1290 passed Farlington, 7.4 miles from Girard, at 2.12 a. m.; train No. 111 is due to pass that point at 2.28 a. m., and extra 1290 therefore had only 16 minutes to travel this distance, make the stop for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Crossing, and be into clear on the siding at Girard; notwithstanding this short time, and the fact that there was a restriction on the speed of the train, also that vision was materially obscured on account of the heavy fog, no member of the crew even suggested waiting at Farlington for the passenger train. Assistant Superintendent Carson, Conductor Mertz, and Flagman Ballah, were riding in the caboose, but provided no protection until the time the stop was made for the crossing, although at least the conductor and flagman were aware extra 1290 was then using the main track on the time of train No. 111. As the circus train started to move over the crossing, the conductor and flagman were on the caboose platform, with the assistant superintendent just inside, watching for the headlight of the passenger train; when it came into view they supposed the train had just rounded the curve about 2 miles distant, and the flagman lighted a fusee, jumped off, and started back, but had reached a point only about 5 car-lengths away at the time the engine of train No. 111 passed. Assistant Superintendent Carson admitted his negligence in his supervision of the handling of this train; he had overlooked train No. 111 and said he was thinking about getting into clear at Girard for an opposing train, due at 3.20 a. m. Conductor Mertz and Flagman Ballah thought there was ample time to get the circus train into clear at Girard, and claimed the accident occurred at 2.33 a. m. But according to their own figures, their train was occupying the track on the time of a superior train, which they had not forgotten, yet they did not comply with the rules to the extent of dropping fusees at any point between Farlington and the crossing, and the conductor said he did not see any necessity for sending out the flagman when making the crossing stop. Engineman Mathewson, Fireman Greenwalt, and Head Brakeman Heinrich, stated that although they knew the circus train was running on short time approaching the crossing, no effort was made to whistle out a flagman, in accordance with the rules, for the reason that they thought there was ample time to be into clear for the passenger train, and also as they had absolute confidence in the competency of the employees riding on

the rear of the train to afford proper protection.

Train No. 111 passed Farlington on time, and the speed had been reduced to 25 miles an hour, in preparation for the stop at the crossing, when Engineman Chitty and Fireman Mullane saw the markers on the caboose of extra 1290 through the fog, followed immediately by the appearance of a lighted fusee, about 5 or 6 car-lengths away; the engineman immediately made an emergency application of the air brakes and opened the sanders.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by extra 1290 occupying the main track on the time of a superior train without proper flag protection.

Engineman Mathewson knew his train passed Farlington at 2.12 a. m., without sufficient time to go to Girard and clear train No. 111 as required by the rules, and knew his train was on the time of train No. 111 when coming to a stop at the crossing, but did not sound the whistle signal for the flagman to protect the train. Conductor Mertz is equally responsible with Engineman Mathewson for operating the train on short time, he did not remember the time his train passed Farlington, but thought it had sufficient time to go to Girard. Assistant Superintendent Carson, who was riding on the train for the sole purpose of supervising its handling, is even more at fault for overlooking a following superior train.

Although the assistant superintendent had forgotten train No. 111, it was his duty to see that the train was properly protected when being brought to a stop at any point in foggy weather. The conductor and flagman, however, had not forgotten train No. 111, and there can be no excuse for their action in practically waiting for the appearance of the headlight of that train, in foggy weather, before making any attempt to provide proper flag protection. Had they even thrown off a fusee when the train was being brought to a stop at the crossing, it is probable that the accident could have been prevented.

All of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the members of the crew of extra 1290 had been on duty less than 2½ hours, after having been off duty 18 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland

Chief, Bureau of Safety.