

In re Investigation of an accident which occurred on the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad near Una, Mo., on November 23, 1916.

December 19, 1916.

On November 23, 1916, there was a head-end collision on the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad between a southbound passenger train of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad and a northbound freight train of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway Company, near Una, Mo., which resulted in the death of two employees and injury to 41 passengers and 5 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

The accident occurred on the Clinton subdivision of the eastern division of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad. Between Sheffield Junction, 5.8 miles south of Kansas City, and Leeds Junction, 8.4 miles south of Kansas City, the track is used jointly by trains of the St. Louis & San Francisco and Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroads, and also by southbound freight trains on the Missouri Pacific Railroad from a point 1.4 miles north of Leeds Junction southward to Leeds Junction. The point of accident is at Una, .6 miles north of Leeds Junction and within yard limits.

This section of line is single track and the movement of trains is governed by the rules and time-table of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad, but is handled by the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific train dispatcher. No operators are employed either at Sheffield Junction or Leeds Junction.

St. Louis & San Francisco southbound passenger train No. 23, en route Kansas City, Mo., to Clinton, Mo., consisting of locomotive 441, a baggage car and two coaches, all of wooden construction was in charge of Engineman Harris and Conductor Gillis. It left Kansas City at 5.00 p. m., on time it was delayed about 20 minutes on the Kansas City Terminal, and left Sheffield, the last station stop, at 5.36 p. m., 21 minutes late, and while running at a speed of about 25 miles per hour collided with Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific freight train No. 99, at a point about 1.6 miles south of Sheffield, at 5.41 p. m.

Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific freight train No. 99, while on the rails of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad, is scheduled as No. 1330. It consisted of locomotive 1928, 34 loaded cars and a caboose, and was in charge of Engineman Blackburn and Conductor Coulter. This train left Eldon, Mo., its initial station at 11.00 a. m., and arrived at Leeds

Junction and stopped clear of the St. Louis & San Francisco track at 5.35 p. m. Conductor Coulter, who was riding on the engine got off and after checking the train register maintained at this junction, gave the engineman of his train a signal to proceed, with his lantern. The train then started, entered the joint track and stopped for water at a water tank about 1,400 feet north of the junction. After taking water the train proceeded and had gone about 2,000 feet when it collided with St. Louis & San Francisco train No. 23.

Both trains remained on the rails; the locomotive of train No. 23 was badly damaged; its tender telescoped and entirely demolished the baggage car; the two coaches were slightly damaged. The locomotive of train No. 99, and the three leading cars were slightly damaged.

The accident occurred on a 2-degree curve to the west, 1,650 feet in length, at a point 528 feet south of the north end of the curve. The track at this point is practically level. Approaching the curve from the north the track is tangent for about three-quarters of a mile, while approaching from the south there is a tangent 925 feet in length. The view of the enginemen of the trains was obstructed by several bunk cars occupying a side track paralleling the main track on the west or inside of the curve. At the time of the accident the weather was clear.

The evidence shows that the air brakes on all cars of both trains were cut in and working properly and that the locomotives on both trains were equipped with electric head-lights in good condition.

Engineman Blackburn, of train No. 99, stated that his train arrived at Leeds Junction at 5.35 p. m. Conductor Coulter got off and examined the train register and gave the proceed signal; the train departed at 5.37 p. m., pulled down about a train length to Una tank, took water and departed from the tank at about 5.40 p. m. He stated that as he approached the point of accident he saw the reflection of a headlight, but at that time he thought it was the headlight of a yard engine working at Una. When he first saw train No. 23, it was about 5 car lengths distant; at that time his train was running about 8 miles per hour; he immediately made an emergency application of the brakes. Engineman Blackburn stated further that the rules require that the conductor shall furnish the engineman with a written check of the register, but that it is a common practice to accept a proceed signal from the conductor in lieu of the written check.

Fireman Don Moyer, of train No. 99, stated that approaching the point of accident he was sitting on the fireman's seat when he heard an engine whistle; Engineman Blackburn asked

him to look around the curve; he stood up to look over the cars standing on the siding and saw train No. 23 approaching, and shouted to Engineer Blackburn to stop; at that time train No. 23 was about 12 car lengths distant; his train had nearly stopped when the collision occurred.

Conductor Coulter, of train No. 99, stated that when his train arrived at Leeds Junction, he checked the register and thought that train No. 23 was registered; he then gave the engineer of his train a proceed signal. His first knowledge of the impending accident was when he felt the application of the brakes. Conductor Coulter is unable to account for his error in checking the train register, except on the theory that he mistook the date, which was the 23d, for train No. 23. He stated that the rule requiring a written check of the train register to be delivered to the engineman was observed at other points, but at this particular point they have fallen into the habit of not observing it. He further stated that if, in this instance, he had written the check as required by the rule, the accident would not have been prevented, as he was sure that train No. 23 was registered and would have so entered it on the register slip.

The engineman and fireman of train No. 23 were killed in the accident.

Conductor Gillis, of train No. 13, stated that the first intimation he received of an impending accident was the application of the brakes, followed immediately by the collision. At that time his train was running at a speed of about 25 miles per hour. He further stated that so far as his train is concerned the rule requiring a written register check to be made out at Leeds Junction is not complied with, and he believes that a like practice is customary with other crews. He does not comply with the rule, because the engine of his train stops opposite the register and he tells the engineman by word of mouth as to what the register shows. Conductor Gillis stated that he believes, however, that when a conductor makes out a written register check he is less liable to enter an overdue train that is not registered than he would be to glance over the register and give a proceed signal, failing to note the non-arrival of a train as in the case where no written register check is used.

General Rules 33 and 33a, of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad, are as follows:

33. A train must not leave its initial station on any district or a junction, or pass from double to single track, until it is ascertained whether all trains due, which are superior, or of the same class, have arrived or left.

83a. The Conductor of every train will deliver to his Engineman at every register station a register check, Form 2071, properly filled out. No Engineman will leave such a station without such check. An exception to this will be made at register stations at which it is not necessary to stop and examine register to determine whether overdue trains have arrived.

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Coulter to correctly check the train register at Leeds Junction.

A contributing cause was the failure of both Conductor Coulter and Engineman Blackburn to comply with rule 83a, in not having a written check made of the train register.

The excuse offered by Conductor Coulter for his error in checking the register is that he may have confused the date with the train number, while that offered for the failure to observe rule 83a is that it was a matter of custom.

Investigation discloses the fact that rule 83a, which is provided for the express purpose of requiring a thorough and accurate check of train registers to be made, is being grossly disregarded at this point and any ordinary supervision should have disclosed this practice.

The time-table shows that on the section of track on which this accident occurred, there are 18 scheduled trains of the St. Louis & San Francisco and Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroads, and in addition quite a number of extra trains and switching movements.

The installation of an adequate block system would provide a greater degree of safety over the present method of operation on this section of track, and conditions existing, and the volume of traffic would seem to warrant such an installation.

Conductor Coulter entered the service of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad as brakeman in April, 1903, and was promoted to conductor in 1908. At the time of the accident he had been on duty 8 hours 41 minutes. Engineman Blackburn entered the service in January, 1904, and was promoted to engineman in 1909. At the time of accident he had been on duty about 8 hours.