

August 20, 1914

**IN RE INVESTIGATION OF A COLLISION WHICH OCCURRED AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE TRACKS OF THE VIRGINIA RAILWAY & POWER COMPANY AND THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY COMPANY AT FAIRMOUNT PARK, VA., ON JULY 17, 1914.**

On July 17, 1914, a two-car electric train of the Virginia Railway & Power Company collided with a freight train of the Virginian Railway at the intersection of the two railways at Fairmount Park, Va., resulting in the death of 7 passengers and the injury of 68 passengers and 3 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Westbound freight train extra 469 of the Virginian Railway consisted of 3 loaded cars, 68 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 469, and was in charge of Conductor Knox and Engineman Ivey. It left its terminal at Sewall's Point, Va., at 12:05 a.m., reached Fairmount Park, about 5 miles distant, at 12:30 a.m., and while passing over the crossing at the street railway was struck by westbound electric train No. 33.

Westbound train No. 33 consisted of motor car No. 2203 and trailer car No. 2250, both of semi-steel underframe construction. It was in charge of Conductors Franklin and Whitley and Motorman Atkinson. This train left its terminal at Willoughby Pier, Va., for Norfolk, Va., at 11:55 p.m., 5 minutes late, and at 12:30 a.m., collided with extra 469 at the 45th car in that train, while running at a speed estimated to have been between 50 and 55 miles per hour.

Motor car No. 2203 was totally destroyed, while the trailer was damaged to some extent on one side. Two of the cars in extra 469 were derailed and turned on their sides, while the forward trucks of a third car were also derailed. None of the freight cars was materially damaged.

The Virginian Railway at the point of accident is a single track line, operated under the train order system, no block signal system being used. The division of the Virginia Railway & Power Co. on which the accident occurred is a double track line, trains being operated under the usual street railway rules. No block signals are used, and trains are spaced by starters and trainmasters located at various points. The tracks of the electric line cross the track of the Virginian Railway on an angle, at a point about 550 feet north of the Fairmount Park station of the electric line. This crossing is protected by two gates. When in the normal position these gates extend across the track of the steam railway; when a train of the steam railway is using the crossing the gates are set against the electric line, extending entirely across both of its tracks. At night two red lights are placed on each gate, and when set against the Electric Railway a red light shows in the middle of each track of the electric line on both sides of the crossing. All trains of both railways are required to come to a full stop before proceeding over this crossing.

Motorman Atkinson testified that approaching the crossing he shut off the power at Simpson's Crossing, a point about 550 feet from the railway crossing, and then fell asleep. When he awoke his train was about two car lengths from the crossing. He did not remember applying the emergency brakes, but did remember referring the power. He further testified that when approaching the crossing he did not remember any one touching him and calling attention to the fact that there were red lights ahead.

Motorman Atkinson testified further that on the morning of July 14 he went to work at 6:15 a.m., went off duty at 1:35 p.m., and then went home to sleep. He again went on duty at 6:35 p.m., at the same time making application to be relieved from work the following day on account of not feeling well. He then continued on duty until the time of the collision. Investigation showed that Motorman Atkinson had been on this run for two weeks. His hours on duty were from 6:15 a.m. until 1:35 p.m., and from 6:35 p.m. until 12:50 a.m. After going off duty at 12:50 a.m. there was no car to take him to his home, four miles away, so the only rest he secured was by laying down on one of the seats in his car while it was in the car barn. In this manner he would get about four hours' rest, whereas if he walked home he would only be able to get about two hours' rest. After going off duty at 1:35 p.m. he would go home, reaching there at about 2:30 p.m. and getting about three hours' sleep before getting up to go on duty at 6:35 p.m. The only rest Motorman Atkinson had had, therefore, was three hours' sleep in the middle of the afternoon, and about four hours' spent on the seat in his car at the car barn. He also testified that occasionally he would go to a nearby hotel instead of sleeping at the car barn. But he could not afford to do this with any degree of regularity.

Mr. T. Gunn, Vice President and General Superintendent of the Virginia Railway & Power Company stated that he was familiar with the working hours of Motorman Atkinson. He also testified that an accident similar to the one here under investigation occurred at this crossing in January, 1913, caused by the motorman failing to stop before reaching the crossing.

Superintendent of Rolling Stock Taurman stated that he examined the equipment after the accident and from the appearance of the wheels there was nothing to show that they had been locked or reversed. In fact, it appeared that the brakes had not been applied at all.

Mr. W. E. Loper stated that he was a passenger on car 2203 at the time of the accident and was sitting on the front seat of the forward car immediately behind the motorman. After passing Simpson's station he noticed a red light just ahead and called to the motorman, as did several other passengers. The motorman made no answer and so far as Mr. Loper could see he made no effort to apply the brakes or shut off the current.

This accident was caused by the failure of Motorman

Atkinson to bring his train to a stop before reaching the crossing, as is required by the rules.

The record shows that Motorman Atkinson was an experienced man with a good record, and had no bad habits. The only reason that can be assigned for his failing to stop his train is that he was asleep.

This investigation disclosed the fact that Motorman Atkinson was on duty for 13 hours and 45 minutes during the twenty-four-hour period, and had periods off duty at such times as to furnish inadequate rest. This condition was known by the operating officers of the Virginia Railway & Power Company, yet no steps were taken to correct it. Operating officers of a railroad who permit a condition of this kind to exist are censurable for dereliction of duty to the public, which relies upon them for safety in train operation. Steps should at once be taken to arrange the working hours of the employees on this road so as to give them an opportunity to secure proper rest, and until such action is taken the traveling public is constantly in danger of serious accident.

The means employed to prevent collisions between trains at this crossing is altogether inadequate to provide proper protection. Traffic over this crossing is exceptionally heavy; on the electric line there are 184 trains daily on week days, 400 on Sundays, and 500 on season holidays, and on the Virginian Railway there are 14 daily trains. A proper regard for the safety of the public would seem to require that where traffic of such density exists the crossing should be protected either by separation of grades, an interlocking plant, or by derrails which would require trains on the electric road to come to a full stop and send a man ahead to the crossing and line up the rails before it would be possible for the electric trains to pass.