No. 106

January 11, 1913.

In re investigation of accident on the Western Maryland Railway at Blue Mountain, Md., November 27, 1912.

On November 27, 1912, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Western Maryland Railway at Blue Mountain siding about 15 miles east of Hagerstown, Md., resulting in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 2 employees.

After investigation I beg to submit the following report:

At the point where the accident occurred the Western Maryland Railway is a single track line running east and west. There is a 6-degree curve, about 2000 feet long, leading toward the north, and a 1½ per cent grade ascending toward the east. From a train rounding this curve the view of the track ahead is obstructed by a hill and by trees, and is limited to but a few hundred feet. Blue Mountain siding is on the south side of the main track and is about 2000 feet long. The block system is not used on this road; trains are operated by time table rules and train orders, east-bound trains being superior by direction. About 30 trains are operated over this road daily.

On November 26 and 27 east-bound freight train No. 204 left Hagerstown, Md., in four sections, the first three of which carried green classification signals indicating that one or more sections were following. First No. 204 departed at 9:40 p.m., November 26; second No. 204 departed at 10:52 p.m., November 26th; third No. 204 departed at 12:14 a.m., November 27th, and fourth No. 204 departed at 12:53 a.m., November 27th. Conductor Nichols and Engineman Henrickson were in charge of fourth No. 204, which consisted of 3 engines and 27 cars.

Highfield is a junction point about 17 miles from Hagerstown. There is train register is maintained, in which a record is kept of the time of arrival and departure of trains, signals displayed, and signatures of conductors and names of enginemen. Superintendent Berry of this division testified that it was the duty of conductors to check train registers and that enginemen are not required to do so or to sign them.

First No. 204 arrived in Highfield at 2:17 a.m., and departed as No. 218 at 2:35 a.m., bound for York, Pa. Second No. 204, with Conductor Mentzer and Engineman Brown in charge, arrived at Highfield at 2:19 a.m. Upon arrival, Conductor Mentzer went to the office and registered his train, the entry indicating that his train had run from Hagerstown to Highfield as second No. 204, carrying green signals. As the conductor was occupied by other duties, the operator registered the time of departure of this train, the entry indicating that this train left Highfield at 2:28 as No. 204, carrying no signals. This

train left over the main line, bound for Baltimore.

Fourth No. 204 overtook third 204 at Mill switch, about 4 miles east of Hagerstown. As fourth No. 204 had an order giving it time on second and third sections of west-bound passenger train No. 7 to Chewsville the signals of these two sections were exchanged as provided by rule 94, and this train proceeded to Chewsville. Train orders were there received directing this section to run as third No. 204. At 2:55 a.m. this section departed from Edgemont, which was the last open telegraph station passed by this train before the accident occurred.

West-bound freight train first No. 203 departed from Baltimore at 8 p.m., November 26, bound for Hagerstown, and at the time of the accident consisted of an engine and 17 cars. Conductor King and Engineman Eckhardt were in charge of this train. First No. 203 arrived at Highfield at 3:19 a.m., November 27. Conductor King stated that upon arrival at Highfield he went to the office, registered his train, and examined the register. He stated that the register showed the arrival of second No. 204 east with no signals, and that he repeated this to the operator in the presence of his head brakeman. After receiving a 19 order calling attention to a switch which was out of service, and a clearance card, he left the office, climbed upon the engine and told Engineman Eckhardt that the schedule of No. 204 east was filled. First No. 203 left Highfield at 3:22 a.m. and collided with third No. 204 at Blue Mountain siding at 3:30 a.m. At the time of the collision the speed of first No. 203 was estimated at about 20 miles per hour. At the time of the accident the weather was clear.

The register book maintained at Highfield is of the form commonly used on railroads and was properly kept. In this register book the record of the arrival of second No. 204 at 3:19 a.m., carrying green signals from Hagerstown to Highfield, was entered on the third line; the departure of this train was noted on the fourth line, the entry reading train No. 204, signals none, departing 3:28 a.m.

Operator Harbaugh was on duty at Highfield stated that Conductor King came to the office, registered his train, checked the register and asked the operator if there were any orders. The operator gave him a nineteen order and a clearance card. He stated that he did not have any conversation with Conductor King regarding the other sections of No. 204 and that he did not hear Conductor King speak of the train register at all. When first No. 203 departed he supposed a meeting point farther along the line had been fixed.

Head Brakeman Spigler of first No. 203 stated that at Highfield the conductor went in and registered. He came out with a nineteen order, and said that first and second No. 204 had filled their schedule and second No. 204 carried no signals.

As a result of this investigation it is believed that Conductor King of first No. 203 in checking over the register at Highfield noted the entry on the fourth line regarding the departure of No. 204 instead of the entry on the third line noting the arrival of second No. 204 carrying green signals indicating a following section. The error on the part of Conductor King in checking the train register was the cause of this accident.

Conductor King had been in the employ of this company for ten years, and had been employed as a conductor for six years. His record was good and he was regarded as a careful and competent man. At the time when the accident occurred he had been on duty 7½ hours, after a period off duty of 15 hours. None of the employees involved in this accident was on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

While this accident was due directly to the failure of an employee properly to perform his duty, it was rendered possible by the system of train operation employed, and displays the inherent weakness of this method of train operation. Had an adequate block signal system been in operation on the Western Maryland Railway at this place the accident probably would have been averted. Under the block system fewer opportunities for errors likely to lead to disaster are presented, and it is believed that the volume of traffic over this road is large enough to warrant the installation of the block system.