

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE LINE OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY AT KIRK, ORE., ON DECEMBER 3, 1923.

January 28, 1924.

To the Commission.

On December 3, 1923, there was a side collision between two freight trains on the line of the Southern Pacific Company at Kirk, Ore., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Weed subdivision of the Shasta Division, extending between Klamath Falls and Kirk, Ore., a distance of 40.7 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this 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 at a point 831 feet west of the station at Kirk, at a switch leading to the east leg of the wye at that point. Approaching Kirk from the west the track is tangent and level for a distance of 798.1 feet to the west switch of the passing track, which is used as a main track for a distance of 1,505 feet to the house track switch; the house track is then utilized as main track for an additional distance of approximately 1,700 feet to the switch connecting it again with the passing track, which in turn connects with the main track just beyond this point; the passing and house tracks, excepting at turnouts at switches, are tangent and on a slightly descending grade for eastbound movements, varying from 0.3 to 0.4 per cent. It was dark and the weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred between 6.25 and 6.40 p.m.

Description.

Eastbound freight train extra 2848, consisting of 18 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Hughes and Engineman James, arrived at Kirk at about 6 p.m. As all of the tracks now used as main tracks were blocked with cars, it was decided to place the cars of this train on one of the industrial spurs east of the station. The train was brought to a stop on the passing track between the switches of the wye tracks, and the engine and one car were detached and proceeded eastward to the industrial spur and proper

space was prepared, after which the engine and car returned to the east yie-track switch, passed around on the yie and coupled to the rear of the train and began pushing the cars eastward, it was while this movement was being made that the head car collided with work extra 2239.

When it arrived at Kirk, work extra 2239 had four cars attached to the rear of the engine and five cars coupled to the head end, and in order to dispose of the five cars ahead of the engine it waited until engine 2048 had finished switching at the east end of the yard and had started to return to its train; extra 2239 then left the five cars on one of the spur tracks, backed westward toward the switch leading to the east leg of the yie, and while backing in at this switch the engine was cornered by the head car of extra 2048.

The force of the collision demolished the left side of the cab of engine 2039. The first car and the rearward track of the second car of extra 2048 were derailed, the first car sustaining considerable damage. The employees killed were the engineer and fireman of engine 2239.

Summary of evidence.

Brakeman Bryant, of extra 2048, stated that extra 2039 arrived while his engine was engaged in clearing a track for its train at the eastern end of the yard, and Brakeman Smith of that train came to where he was working and informed him that extra 2239 would follow extra 2048 westward and could then go into clear on the yie, after which engine 2048 could then shove its cars by on the house track and into clear on the industrial spur, to which arrangement he assented. When his engine reached the yie-track switch, on its westward movement, Brakeman Bryant got off at the switch and as the engine passed him he called to Brakeman Hoxie that he would lock out for the head end of the cut after the train was coupled, which was acknowledged as understood by Brakeman Hoxie. Engine 2239 at that time was switching near the east end of the house-track switch, and Brakeman Bryant said he intended holding his train west of the switch until extra 2239 was into clear on the yie track. When engine 2039 reached a point about six or seven car lengths from the switch he gave the train signals indicating that the track was clear, but as extra 2039 was nearing the switch he heard engine 2048 sound three short blasts on the engine whistle and the backward movement of his own train started, and despite stop signals given by him until his light was extinguished, continued on back until the head car cornered engine 2039.

Brakeman Hoxie, of extra 2848, said that after his engine had made the turn on the wye and coupled to the caboose, he looked forward in the direction of the wye-track switch and not seeing any signals from that end he gave the engineman a back-up signal from his position at the caboose, which was acknowledged by three blasts of the engine whistle, after an interval of about one and one-half or two minutes the backward movement was started, and as there was only about 15 feet clearance at the east wye-track switch, the collision occurred almost immediately after the train had started. Brakeman Hoxie said he thought the engineman would not move until he received a signal from the head end, the back-up whistle signal merely being information to Brakeman Bryant that they were ready to move.

Engineman James, of extra 2848, said upon receiving a signal from brakeman Hoxie he sounded the back-up signal on the whistle and after a short delay of a minute or two to pump up the train line, he started the backward movement. He knew nothing of the arrangement between Brakemen Bryant and Smith, and did not see the stop signals which Brakeman Bryant claims to have given after the back-up whistle signal was sounded, the first knowledge he had of anything wrong being when the air brakes were applied from the head end of the train which later proved to have been due to the angle cock on the head car having been broken off by the impact with engine 2239. Conductor Hughes, of extra 2848, had gone to the station with way bills and knew nothing concerning the occurrence of the accident.

Conductor Lilly, of extra 2239, stated that while he had not been consulted, he knew of the arrangement between Brakemen Smith and Bryant and approved of the intended move. He boarded the engine just a minute or two before the accident, and was riding on the engineman's side talking to Fireman Reno, who was handling the engine at that time, when they were cornered by the cars being pushed by engine 2848. He did not hear or see any signals from engine 2848 or its crew. The statements of Brakeman Smith, of extra 2239, brought out no additional information.

Conclusions.

The accident was caused by Brakeman Hoxie giving Engineman James, of extra 2848, a signal to back up without first obtaining a signal from the head end of the train indicating that the track was clear.

All that Brakeman Bryant told Brakeman Hoxie was that he would look out for the head end of the cut of cars, but after the engine had been coupled to the cars Brakeman Hoxie gave the engineman a back-up signal, saying he thought the engineman would wait for a similar signal from the head end before beginning the movement. Brakeman Hoxie is at fault for giving a signal to back the cars until such a signal had been given from the head end, unless he had personal knowledge that the track was clear and the switches properly lined for the movement to be made.

None of the employees involved in this accident had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W P. BORLAND

Director.