

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN THE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD AT AMBOY, ARK., ON DECEMBER 15, 1923.

February 16, 1924

To the Commission:

On December 15, 1923, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Amboy, Ark., resulting in the death of 2 employees and 1 trespasser, and the injury of 155 passengers, 4 other persons, and 8 employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Van Buren District of the Central Division, extending between Van Buren and Little Rock, Ark., a distance of 153.99 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. Time-table directions are used in this report. This accident occurred on the passing track at Amboy, at a point 314 feet south of the north switch, this is a facing-point switch for southbound trains and leads off the main track through a No. 10 turnout to the west. Approaching the point of accident from the north there is a 30° curve to the right 2,279 feet in length, followed by more than 4,000 feet of tangent, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point 979 feet from its northern end. The grade is descending for southbound trains, being 0.67 per cent at the point of accident. The switch-stand is located on the engineer's side of a south-bound train, the night indications of the switch-light are red when the switch is lined for the passing track, and green when lined for the main track. The view is unobstructed. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 9.50 p.m.

Description.

Northbound passenger train No. 103 consisted of 1 mail car, 1 baggage car, 1 coach, 1 chair car, and 2 Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 5508, and was in charge of Conductor Savery and Engineer Pierce. This train passed Levy, 1.42 miles from Amboy, at 9.37 p.m., about 3 minutes late, headed in at the south side of the passing track at Amboy for the purpose of meeting train No. 105, in accord-

ance with a train order, was brought to a stop on the siding 314 feet south of the north switch at about 9.45 p.m., and while standing at this point its head end was struck by train No. 103.

Southbound passenger train No. 103, consisted of 1 mail car, 1 baggage car, 2 coaches, 1 chair car, 1 dining car, and 1 business car, in the order named, hauled by engine 5534, and was in charge of Conductor Freeman and Engineer Lannan. This train passed Marche, 6.16 miles from Amboy, at 9.43 p.m., 3 hours and 13 minutes late, entered the north switch of the passing track at Amboy, and while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles an hour collided with train No. 106.

The force of the impact drove train No. 106 backwards several feet, badly damaging both engines, their front ends being crushed and interlocked, the cab of engine 5534 was demolished and the cab of engine 5506 was dislocated. The tender of engine 5544, the first car in this train, and the forward truck of the second car were derailed, the car remaining upright. All of the cars in both trains were damaged by the force of the impact. The employees killed were the engineer and fireman of train No. 106.

Summary of evidence.

Engineer Lannan of train No. 103 stated that approaching Amboy he first sounded the meeting point signal on the engine whistle, and then the station signal, he had reduced the speed of train No. 103 to about 25 miles per hour as it rounded the curve, on account of the order to meet train No. 106. He saw the switch light which was green when he was 8 or 10 telegraph poles away and he received a hand-lantern proceed signal from some one on the main track, near the switch-stand, at which time the switch light was displaying a green indication, he acknowledged this signal by two blasts of the engine whistle and opened the throttle to increase speed. When about three or four car-lengths from the switch-stand, he saw the switch-light was red and he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, jumping from the fireman's side of the cab just before the accident occurred. Engineer Lannan stated that the headlight of train No. 106 was dimmed when he first saw it, was of the opinion that the emergency application of the air brakes did not take effect properly owing to the train line not having been fully recharged from the time of the prior application made to bring the train under control, that the hand lantern proceed signal given from a point near the switch-stand was such as an employee in train service would give, that the man who gave this signal wore a uniform cap and carried a lantern in his hand, crossed the main line to the east side of the track, standing on a small embankment almost opposite the switch as

the engine passed, but he could not positively identify him.

Statements of the fireman practically corroborated those of Engineman Lannan. Several members of both train crews saw the green indication of the switch light as train No. 103 was approaching. Conductor Freeman estimated the speed when entering the switch to have been between 30 and 35 miles an hour.

Inspection of the switch and its appurtenances immediately after the accident, the fifth car of train No. 103 having come to rest standing over the switch-points, disclosed that the switch was lined for the passing track, the light displaying a red indication, the lock lying on the west side of the head block tie, unlocked, the lever in the socket and latched, and the points fitting properly, there was no indication of malicious tampering.

Train Porter Talley, of train No 106, stated that his train stopped on the passing track at Amboy about 4 or 5 car lengths south of the clearance point, and the switch-light at the north end of this siding was at that time displaying a green indication. About 2 or 3 minutes after coming to a stop he saw the reflection of the headlight of the southbound train; he got down from the right side of the engine with a lantern, but did not look at the switch-light, and started directly across the main track; when he had reached about the center of the main track he saw the southbound train head in at the north switch, and he then ran across the track and tried to climb the bank. Train Porter Talley stated positively that he did not open or go near the switch, and that he did not give the southbound train a hand lantern proceed signal. He did not see any one in the vicinity of the switch. He wore his uniform cap. While he was in the engine cab he heard train No. 103 sound the station whistle signal when it was about a mile away, but he did not think he had time to have reached the switch after his train stopped and before the arrival of train No. 103.

Conductor Savery, of train No. 106, stated the engine of his train stopped about three-car-lengths south of the siding clearance point, and was standing at this point about 3 or 4 minutes before the accident occurred. He thought that not enough time elapsed, between the time his train stopped on the siding and the arrival of train No. 103, for the porter to have lined the switch involved. At the time of the accident he was at the rear end of the train. He went forward, met Train Porter Talley at about the rear end of the tender and asked him if he had thrown the switch; he denied this and stated he had not been near the switch.

Flagman Tucket, of train No. 106, said that before the accident he looked forward and saw the green switch indication, and at that time a man who he thought was Porter Talley was standing on the ground about opposite the engine. After the collision he went forward and met Porter Talley opposite the chair car. He did not think there was time after his train stopped on the siding for the porter to have gone to the switch and gotten back to the point where he met him.

Train Auditor Miller stated that it was about 5 minutes from the time train No. 106 stopped until the accident occurred.

Railway Mail Clerk Lucas, who was on train No. 106, stated that immediately after the accident he went forward and met Train Porter Talley about opposite the engines.

General Superintendent Brooks, who was riding on train No. 103, at the time of the accident, stated that after rounding the curve approaching Amboy he heard the two blasts of the engine whistle sounded by Engineman Lannan and he noted the engineman began to use steam. After running a distance which he estimated to be between 600 and 800 feet the brakes were applied in emergency and in less than 30 seconds the collision occurred. He immediately made an investigation. The switch was lined for the siding, the switch light was red, and the switch-lock lay on the south head block. Engineman Lannan told him that the two blasts of the whistle were in answer to a high ball out that shortly after he opened the throttle he saw the switch had been turned to show red and a man with a lantern was running across the track. He also questioned Conductor Savery and Porter Talley of train No. 106, and came to the conclusion that train No. 106 stopped on the siding sufficiently in advance of the arrival of train No. 103 to permit Porter Talley to go to the switch; that he unlocked the switch preparatory to throwing it after train No. 103 passed, and when that train approached he opened the switch in a moment of absentmindedness or confusion.

The last train to use this switch prior to the accident was southbound freight train No. 197, at about 5 p.m. of the day of the accident it entered the siding in order to meet a northbound passenger train. Southbound freight train No. 167 passed over both switches of the passing track at Amboy, using the main line, at about 8:20 p.m., while northbound passenger train No. 118 also passed Amboy at about 9.30 p.m.

Conclusions.

The accident was caused by a switch being opened in front of an approaching train.

The investigation established the fact that the switch involved in this accident was opened just before train No. 103 reached it. A number of employees saw the green light, indicating that it was closed, before the accident, the engineman and fireman of train No. 103 saw the red indication, indicating that the switch was open, just before their train entered it, and the switch was found latched in open position after the accident occurred. Circumstances strongly indicate that Train Porter Talley was the man who operated the switch. It was his duty to open the switch after train No. 103 passed, the switch lock was unlocked, requiring the use of a switch key, and was lying on the headblock as though the one who operated the switch expected to use it again, he wore a uniform cap and carried a white lantern, as did the man who, according to Engineman Lannan, was standing near the switch and gave a proceed signal as his train approached, and it is believed he had sufficient time to go from the engine of train No. 106 to the switch before train No. 103 arrived. Porter Talley is the only man known to have been on the ground at the head end of train No. 106 before train No. 103 arrived. The engineman and fireman of train No. 106 who may have known something of the movements of Porter Talley were both killed in the accident, other members of the crew of this train did not see Porter Talley after the accident until a period of time had elapsed which would probably have permitted him to return to his train from a point near the switch. Notwithstanding this circumstantial evidence, Train Porter Talley denied that he operated or went near the switch prior to the accident.

Train Porter Talley had been in the service of the company for approximately two years, with a clear record, and General Superintendent Brooks stated that he has never been known to be malicious or careless.

All of the other employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 106 had been on duty less than 1 hour, and the crew of train No. 103 less than 8 hours, previous to which they had been off duty more than 13 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.