

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN
RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROAD NEAR KALAMAZOO, MICH.,
ON SEPTEMBER 24, 1924.

October 17, 1924.

To the Commission:

On September 24, 1924, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Michigan Central Railroad near Kalamazoo, Mich., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 25 passengers, 1 employee and 1 Pullman porter.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Middle Division extending between Jackson and Niles, Mich., a distance of 116.47 miles, this being a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at a private crossing of the Hawthorne Paper Company about 2 miles east of the station at Kalamazoo. Approaching this point from the east there are 1,553 feet of tangent and a curve to the right of $1^{\circ} 30'$ which is 2,694 feet in length, the point of accident being on the curve about 800 feet from its eastern end. The grade is slightly descending. The weather was dark and slightly foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4.30 a.m.

Description

Westbound passenger train No. 1 consisted of one mail car, one club car, five Pullman sleeping cars, two coaches, and two Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 8338, and was in charge of Conductor Birdsall and Engineman Adams. It left Augusta, the last open office, 13.21 miles from Kalamazoo, at 4.18 a.m., seven minutes late, and was derailed by striking an automobile at the private crossing of the paper company while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 50 to 60 miles an hour.

Apparently the engine track wheels became derailed at a point about 219 feet beyond the crossing, continuing in this position until they reached a facing-point switch approximately 1,000 feet from the crossing, beyond which point the track was badly torn up for a distance of 550 feet, the engine coming to rest on its right side about 1,600 feet from the crossing, quite badly damaged. None of the derailed cars was entirely overturned, although three or four of them were considerably damaged. The employee killed was the engineman.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Martin said he called the indication of an automatic signal about 1 mile east of the crossing and was engaged in working on the fire until after passing the paper company, when he looked ahead and saw fire flying from under the front end of the engine on the left side, called to the engineman and heard the exhaust of the air brakes; it was at about this time that the engine seemed to leap into the air and become entirely derailed.

Conductor Birdsall, was riding in the club car, said his first knowledge of anything wrong was a violent jerk which threw him to the floor and he did not regain his feet until the train stopped. His statement was corroborated by that of the baggagemaster, who was also riding in the club car. Head Brakeman Keeland, who was riding in the eighth car in the train, and Brakeman Mc Williams, who was riding in the rear of the last car, said they felt the air brakes applied in emergency at about the time the derailment occurred.

The automobile which was struck was a Durant touring car, owned and driven by Burl Hilton, an employee of the paper company. He said he left the paper mill about 4.10 a.m., stopped before proceeding over the crossing, and then started across. At this time the right headlight was not burning, but he said the left headlight was burning as well as a spotlight with which the car was equipped; the

side curtains were up. In passing over the crossing the left rear wheel dropped off the ends of the crossing planks, between the rails of the eastbound track. The automobile was in low gear and Mr. Hilton said he kept the car moving in an endeavor to get the wheel back on the crossing, but not only was he unsuccessful in this effort, but finally the front wheels got off the ends of the planks, the car then standing with the front wheels north of the north rail of the westbound track with the rear wheels between the rails of that track. About two minutes afterwards a stranger approached and the two of them tried to move the car, but succeeded only in getting the rear wheels south of the south rail, while the two front wheels were still on the north side of the north rail, the car then being about 15 feet west of the crossing. At the end of a period of about five minutes the stranger departed in search of assistance and Mr. Hilton got back into the car but could not move it as the rear wheels kept spinning in the loose gravel. On looking out he saw the reflection of the headlight as train No. 1 approached, got out of the car and started toward the train hoping to signal the engineman to stop, but had only reached a point about 50 or 60 feet from the automobile when the train passed him.

Mr. Hilton further stated that he was 17 years of age and had been operating an automobile for about two years, having operator's license No. 818479, issued in December, 1922. He had been employed by the paper company for a period of about eight months and had driven his automobile to and from work, using the crossing at least twice daily. The investigation also developed that the crossing is protected by a watchman at certain hours of the day out that no such protection was afforded at the time of the day at which this accident occurred.

The automobile was demolished and parts of it were strewn along the track all the way from the crossing to the point where the rear end of the train stopped after the accident, a distance of several hundred feet.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by train No. 1 striking an automobile which had gotten off the ends of the crossing planks and was astride the rails of the westbound main track.

The automobile was demolished as a result of the accident and apparently some portion of it went under the engine-truck wheels, causing them to become derailed and finally to result in the derailment of the train. The statements of the driver of the automobile indicate that he drove his car too close to the left side of the crossing, resulting in one wheel dropping off the ends of the crossing planks, and that as a result of subsequent efforts to get the car back on the crossing all the remaining wheels dropped off the ends of the planks and that at the time of the accident the front wheels were south of the south rail with the rear wheels on the north side of the north rail. The driver said he ran towards the train giving signals but apparently the engineman did not see him, and the investigation did not develop definitely whether the engineman saw the automobile or realized that the engine-truck wheels had been derailed/until about the time the fireman called to him, a second or two before the engine became entirely derailed.

The crossing at which the accident occurred is a private crossing protected by a watchman at certain periods of the day, this watchman, however, was not on duty at the time of the accident. The operator of the automobile possessed an operator's license and was thoroughly familiar with the crossing, having used it daily during the past eight months.

The members of the crew of train No. 1 were experienced employees, and none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the Hours of Service Law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.