

BUREAU OF SAFETY

REPORT NO. 1952

Railroad: Chicago, Burlington & Quincy

Date: December 8, 1934

Location: Freeman, Ill.

Kind of accident: Side collision

Trains involved: Freight and mine switching train

Casualties: Three killed

Summary of facts: Mine switch crew worked several hours at mine far enough from main track to prevent them from knowing whether all scheduled trains had passed. Completed work after dark and then moved out on main track within yard limits without first telephoning to ascertain location of scheduled trains, in accordance with practice of many years standing, and verbal instructions. Mine train struck by overdue second-class freight which by rule was required to move prepared to stop unless main track was seen or known to be clear.

Cause: Failure to operate under proper control within yard limits. Foreman of mine crew should have ascertained location of overdue trains.

1952

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE CHICAGO, BURLINGTON & QUINCY RAILROAD
AT FREEMAN, ILL., ON DECEMBER 8, 1934.

February 25, 1935.

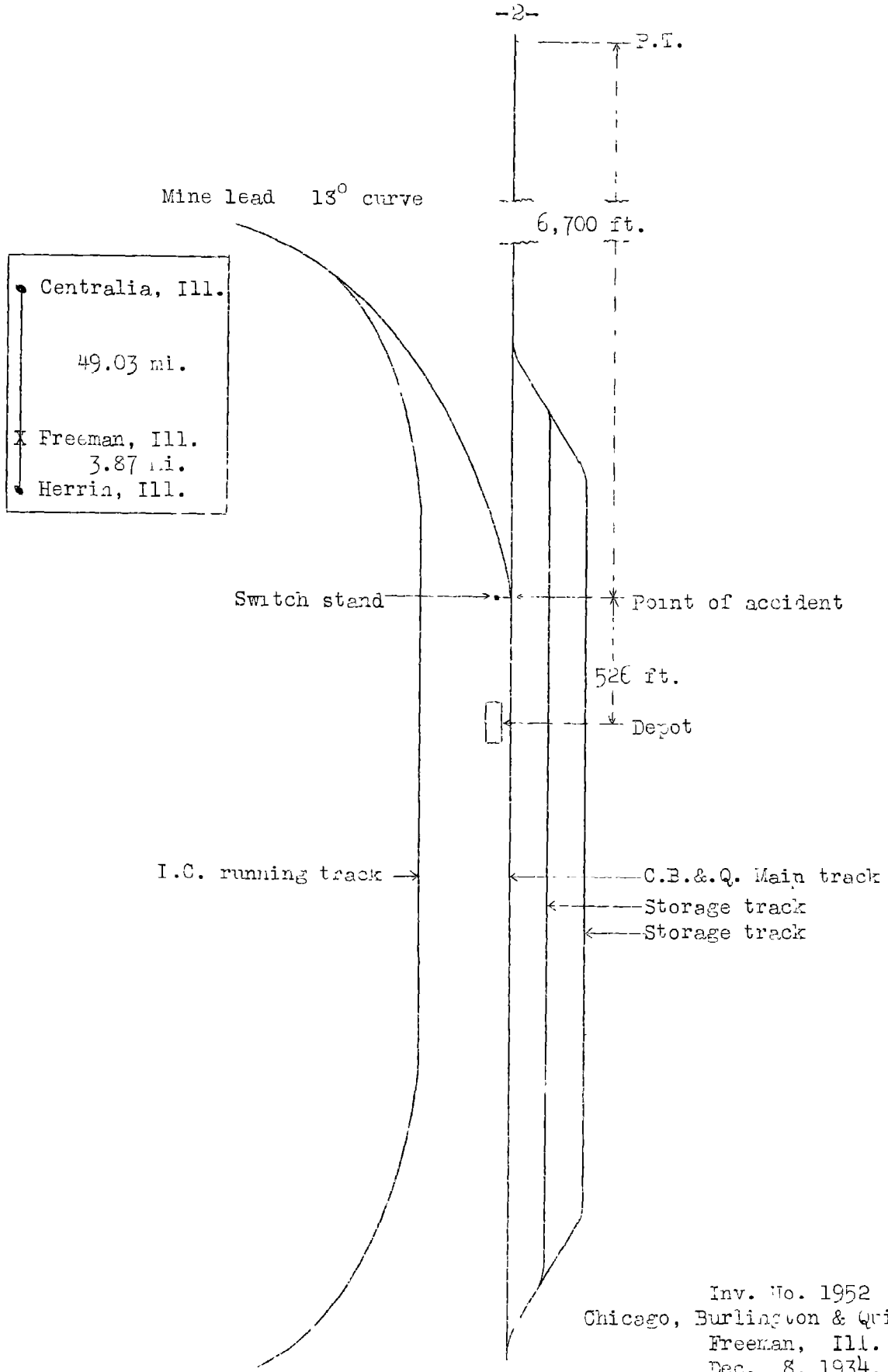
To the Commission:

On December 8, 1934, there was a side collision between a mine switch train and a freight train on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad at Freeman, Ill., which resulted in the death of three employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Centralia and Herrin Sub-Division of the Beardstown Division, which extends between Centralia and Herrin, Ill., a distance of 52.9 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. The accident occurred within yard limits of the Herrin Switching District at a point approximately 1.9 miles south of the north yard-limit board and about 526 feet north of the station at Freeman. On the west side of the main track, which extends practically north and south at this point, there are several yard tracks of Franklin County No. 5 mine of the South Illinois Coal & Coke Company; they extend practically east and west, and connect with the main line through a lead track having a curvature of 18° towards the south, the accident occurring at the fouling point of this lead track. Approaching this point from the north on the main track, there is a 1° curve to the right 6,538 feet in length, followed by tangent track to the point of accident, a distance of about 6,700 feet, and for a considerable distance beyond that point. The grade for southbound trains is slightly descending, being 0.13 percent at the point of accident.

The lead-track switch stand is equipped with a switch lamp with the center of the lens 7 feet 7 inches above the tops of the rails; the stand is located on the engineman's side of a south-bound train. High coal cars in a train moving from the lead track to the main track would obscure his view of the switch lamp but it could be seen over the tops of low-side coal cars for a distance of at least one-fourth mile. Owing to the sharp curvature of the lead track the marker lights on a caboose moving



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from the mine track can not be seen by the engineman of a south-bound train on the main track until the caboose is close to the main track.

Under rule 93, second-class trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear.

It was dark and a light snow was falling at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6.50 p.m.

Description

The mine train, south-bound, consisted of 33 loaded coal cars, most of which were high enough to obstruct the view of the switch lamp, and a caboose, hauled by engine 5006, and was in charge of Foreman Darnell and Engineman Miller. This train departed from Franklin County No. 5 mine yard about 6:40 p.m., and was moving from the lead track to the main track at a speed estimated to have been about 5 miles per hour when it was struck by Train No. 70.

Train No. 70, a south-bound second-class freight train, consisted of 44 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 5131, and was in charge of Conductor Waring and Engineman Goodman. This train left Centralia freight yard, 49.43 miles north of Freeman, at 5:25 p.m., 3 hours and 40 minutes late, passed Christopher, 8.88 miles from Freeman and the last open office, at 6:35 p.m., and was approaching the station at Freeman when it collided with the side of the mine train while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 40 miles per hour.

The twenty-first, twenty-second and twenty-third cars in the mine train were derailed to the west and badly damaged. The engine, tender, and first 10 cars in Train No. 70 also were derailed, the engine stopping on its left side east of the main track with its forward end 150 feet south of the point of accident. The tender remained coupled to the engine, leaning to the left at an angle of about 45° and the derailed cars were scattered in various positions across the main and two adjacent storage tracks, damaging these cars and two other cars standing on the storage tracks. The employees killed were the engineman, fireman and head brakeman of Train No. 70.

Summary of evidence

Foreman Darnell, of switch engine 5006, stated that his train was engaged in switching cars in No. 5 mine yard from 12:45 p.m. until 6:30 p.m., and was ready to depart about 6:35 p.m. He walked ahead of the train to the main track accompanied by the head brakeman, the switch was opened, and then the foreman gave a proceed signal. While the train was entering the main track, moving at a speed of between 4 and 6 miles per hour, he was busy in checking the cars and did not see Train No. 70 approaching until his attention was attracted by its headlight when it was about 200 feet away; he estimated the speed of that train at 40 miles per hour at the time of the accident and said he had not heard it whistle for a nearby road crossing. Before opening the switch, Foreman Darnell had not called by telephone to ascertain the location of scheduled trains, saying this was the first time in 20 years that he had failed to do so and that the thought of Train No. 70 had not occurred to him; he also said that he had heard a train pass at about 3:30 p.m. and thought it was Train No. 70, which is scheduled to arrive at Herrin Junction, 2.27 miles beyond Freeman, at 3:15 p.m.

Engineman Miller, of switch engine 5006, stated that while the air was being pumped up preparatory to leaving the yard the foreman went ahead to the main-track switch and the engineman supposed the foreman would telephone before they went out on the main track, in accordance with the practice which had been followed during his service of 3 years in this work. As soon as Engineman Miller received a proceed signal he started the train and then was given a stop signal, and after standing about 2 minutes the switch was opened and he received another proceed signal; he again started the train, and was entering the main track at a speed of 4 or 5 miles per hour when he felt the impact of the collision. He had not heard a whistle sounded nor had he seen the reflection of the headlight of Train No. 70 prior to the accident; the headlight of his own engine was burning but the light on the rear end of the tender was extinguished as it was not customary to have it turned on while moving ahead.

Fireman Gutrie, of switch engine 5006, stated that he did not see a train approaching from the north while his own train was moving out on the main track and he did not look in that direction again until after the accident occurred; he estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident at 5 or 6 miles per hour.

Switchman Hardwick, of switch engine 5006, stated that he gave a proceed signal as soon as the train was ready to depart from the mine yard but on seeing the headlight of an engine in the south end of the yard and not being certain which track it was occupying, he gave his enginemen a stop signal; finally the foreman told him to open the switch and after doing so he signalled his train to proceed; he boarded the engine when it passed him and was in the engineman's side of the cab at the time of the accident. Switchman Hardwick further stated that he had not seen Train No. 70 pass and did not see or hear it approaching prior to the accident; he thought the foreman had telephoned for the purpose of obtaining information concerning overdue trains but did not question him about the matter.

Switchman Rude, of engine 5006, stated that after the train was made up in the mine yard they coupled the air as far as possible, there being a broken train line on the tenth or eleventh car. He went over the train releasing hand brakes and got on the caboose, gave a proceed signal and the train started, but it stopped again after moving about two car lengths. After it started the second time he went inside the caboose, lighted the two marker lamps, and was placing one of them in position when he observed the headlight of an engine approaching from the north but thought at the time that it was a switch engine. After procuring the other marker he discovered that it was Train No. 70 approaching and immediately jumped off and ran towards the main track giving stop signals with the marker; these signals were not acknowledged and he was still 75 or 80 feet from the main line when the head end of Train No. 70 passed him, with the engine working steam; no sparks were flying from the wheels to indicate that the brakes had been applied. It had been the practice for several years to telephone so as to find out whether important second-class trains had passed, and he had been instructed on several occasions by the assistant superintendent and the general yardmaster to see that this was done.

Conductor Waring, of Train No. 70, stated that before leaving Centralia he conversed with Enginemen Goodman, who appeared to be in normal condition at that time. The brakes were tested and functioned properly before departing and no stops were made en route. Speed was reduced to about 18 or 20 miles per hour at Zeigler Junction, 6.6 miles north of Freeman, by means of the automatic brakes, and was later increased to between 30 and 35 miles per hour, at which speed the train was traveling at the time of the accident, no brake application being made until immediately before the collision occurred.

He was in the left side of the cupola of the caboose, but did not see any indications of a headlight, lanterns or red lights ahead of his train; he also said he heard the engineman sound the whistle for the station at Freeman and also for a road crossing in that vicinity. Conductor Waring understood the rules required his train to be operated within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track was seen or known to be clear but did not think it was being operated at an unsafe rate of speed; in fact it had lost about 10 minutes en route compared with the time made by other enginemen.

Rear Brakeman Pettis, of Train No. 70, stated that the brakes were tested at Centralia and he was of the opinion they were applied three times before the train reached Freeman. He thought the speed was not excessive at any point en route and said the train was traveling at the usual speed of between 30 and 35 miles per hour through the yard at Freeman, although the train was considerably behind schedule and it was dark at the time. He was in the right side of the caboose cupola looking ahead but did not see the mine train or any lights in the vicinity of the mine-yard lead track. He first felt a slight application of the brakes about a train length from the point of accident, which was followed later by another application but there was no material reduction in speed prior to the accident.

Assistant Superintendent Goodman stated that he arrived at the scene of accident about 11:30 p.m. and after examining the wreckage he formed the opinion that Train No. 70 must have been traveling between 25 and 35 miles per hour at the time of the accident. He described the territory in which the accident occurred as within yard limits of the Herrin mining district, where second-class trains are required to be prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, and said that two or more yard engines had been used daily in this district, except on Sundays, during the 30-day period prior to the accident.

General Yardmaster McCosky, who had had over 24 years' service with this railroad, 11 years of which had been spent as general yardmaster in this territory, said it was the practice and in accordance with instructions for switch crews before occupying the main track to stop and telephone to him after finishing their work at a mine, the purpose being to have them stay out of the way of fast trains and also to be in position to handle any other work which might need attention; these instructions had been in effect ever since he had been railroad-

According to the record, nearly all of the coal cars being handled by engine 5006 were high enough to prevent the switch lamp from being seen by a south-bound engineman, even without allowing for the lading being higher than the sides of the cars.

Conclusions

This accident was caused primarily by the failure of Train No. 70 to be operated under proper control within yard limits.

Under rule 93 it is provided that second and inferior class and extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear. There are a great many yards in the territory through which this train was operating and under normal conditions it passes through them in daylight, moving under a time-table schedule which between Cambon and Herrin Junction, a distance of 5.47 miles, within which territory this accident occurred, calls for an average speed of nearly 33 miles per hour, although two-thirds of it is within yard limits. On this occasion, however, it was dark, yet the train was making approximately schedule time, passing through this particular yard at a speed estimated by its conductor to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour. The evidence indicated that the switch lamp was burning properly and displayed a red indication but that this indication was obscured by the coal cars moving out of the mine lead track, with the result that the engineman apparently had no warning of danger until a few seconds before the accident occurred, consequently he was unable to effect any appreciable reduction in the speed of the train.

The Herrin switching district covers a distance of about 7 miles, within which there is a train yard, a storage yard, and nine tracks leading off to coal mines. In some cases, as in the case of Franklin County No. 5 mine, crews when switching at the mines are too far from the main track to keep informed concerning passing trains and a practice has been in existence for the past 15 or 20 years, and the general yardmaster said crews were so instructed, for these coal mine switching crews, before moving out upon the main track, to call by telephone and obtain information about train movements as well as other work which might require attention. In this particular case, however, Foreman Darnell failed to obey the instructions and it seems more than probable that he assumed Train No. 70 had passed. There can be little doubt but that the engineman of Train No. 70 to some extent relied upon this practice, and the instructions, to avoid the very situation which arose on this occasion. Foreman

Darnell was thoroughly familiar with the prevailing conditions and the practice which had been followed, having worked in this territory for many years, and he shares in the responsibility for the occurrence of this accident as a result of his failure to ascertain the location of overdue trains before occupying the main track.

The situation presented here had to do with a practice which has been made necessary by local operating conditions and has existed for a great many years, yet it is not included among the rules or other printed instructions; so far as the rules are concerned, therefore, responsibility for the accident rests solely with the approaching train although from the standpoint of practice, much of the responsibility rests with the foreman of the mine train. When a practice has been in effect for many years it assumes the force of a rule and this is especially true when it is backed up by verbal instructions from officials to employees. The record in this case does not indicate any reason why this practice should not have been given official recognition to the extent of incorporating it among the time-table instructions or by publishing it by proper authority in such other form as the railroad company might desire, and it is recommended that appropriate action of this character be promptly taken.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.