

In re Investigation of Accident on the Chicago & North
Western Railway near Crystal Lake, Ill., on May 17, 1914.

June 18, 1914.

On May 17, 1914, there was a head-end collision on the Chicago & North Western Railway near Crystal Lake, Ill., between a passenger train and a locomotive doing switching work, resulting in the injury of 25 passengers and 4 employees.

After investigation of this accident the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Train No. 771, a first-class passenger train running between West Chicago, Ill., and Williams Bay, Wis., on Sundays only, consisted of 1 combination baggage-passenger car and 5 coaches, all of wooden non-vestibule construction, hauled by locomotive No. 4, and in charge of Conductor Carey and Engineer Fraley. This train left West Chicago at 8:20 a.m., on time, passed Algonquin, the last telegraph station before reaching Crystal Lake, at 9:21 a.m., two minutes late, passed CS tower, the diverging point to the wye leading to Crystal Lake station, at about 9:34 a.m., and a few seconds later collided with locomotive No. 383 about midway on the wye while running at a speed estimated to have been from 5 to 15 miles per hour.

Locomotive No. 383 was in charge of Conductor Woodworth and Engineer Curphy. At the time of the accident it was coupled to a steel underframe gondola car loaded with coal for the purpose of taking it to the roundhouse. While backing down the wye toward CS tower to head in on the roundhouse track, it collided

with train No. 771. At the time of the collision locomotive 383 had come to a stop.

The Fox River District of the Galena Division, upon which this accident occurred, is a single-track line, operated by the telegraph block system, and passes under the double track line of the Wisconsin Division about 600 feet east of the station at Crystal Lake. CS tower is located about 1,150 feet south of Crystal Lake station. That piece of track between CS tower and Crystal Lake is known as the wye and is the main track for trains running into Crystal Lake. Between CS tower and Crystal Lake the grade is ascending for northbound trains, and the track is laid on a curve varying from eight to ten degrees leading to the west, which materially obscures the view from CS tower. Trains by day are governed by the train-order signal at CS tower, which serves the double purpose of train-order signal and a spacing board in connection with the telegraph station block. The normal position of this order board is horizontal, indicating stop, and conductors of all trains must receive an order or clearance before it may be passed.

At 4:55 p.m. on May 16th the crew in charge of locomotive 383 received a copy of train order No. 40, reading as follows:

"C&E Eng. 383 at CS tower 4:55 p.m. Engine 383 works seven (7) p.m. to nine (9) a.m. between Crystal Lake and Algonquin not protecting against extras. No. seven ninety-two 792 wait at Crystal Lake until 11:15 p.m. for work extra 383."

It appeared that at about 9:30 a.m. on May 17th Conductor Woodworth of locomotive 383 went into the telegraph office at Crystal Lake while the remainder of the crew were coupling

locomotive 383 onto the car of coal for the purpose of taking it to the roundhouse. He asked the operator on duty at Crystal Lake regarding train No. 771 and was informed that that train had left Algonquin at 9:21 a.m. He then asked the operator to arrange with the operator at CS tower to hold train No. 771 by means of the order-board signal, which is located 1,080 feet south of CS tower, until locomotive 383 could come down on the wye and head in on the roundhouse track, stating that they would be ready to start in about two minutes. The operator at CS tower understood the operator at Crystal Lake to say that locomotive 383 would be ready to start in twenty minutes and replied that it would be all right. Conductor Woodworth then signaled the engineman to back up, boarded the locomotive, and while it was proceeding down the wye collided with train No. 771.

Conductor Woodworth of locomotive 383 stated that as locomotive 383 was proceeding on the wye toward CS tower the crew saw the signal board at CS tower set against them and stopped. About the same time train No. 771 was seen approaching and shortly thereafter collided with locomotive 383. He stated that when a scheduled train was due or overdue, and it was desired to use the wye, it was customary to make arrangements with the operators to hold the scheduled train at CS tower until the inferior train could make the proposed movement. Two or three similar movements had been made within the last two months. He said he knew at what time train No. 771 was due at CS tower and according to the rules he should have had locomotive 383 in the clear, but it was customary to accept the oral orders of the operators.

Engineman Curphy of locomotive 383 stated that after the conductor came out of the telegraph office and signaled him to back up the conductor advised him that train No. 771 had passed Algonquin at 9:22 a.m. and that the operator at CS tower would hold that train until locomotive could be moved down on the wye. Locomotive 383 then proceeded toward CS tower at a speed of 3 or 4 miles per hour and when he saw the signal board set against him he applied the brakes and jumped. It was his understanding that his train would have to keep clear of scheduled trains on this piece of track, but considered they were moving within their rights because they had the permission of the operator to make this movement. He had made similar movements against first-class trains and stated that when making yard movements it was customary to accept oral orders from the operators, even though such orders were contrary to established rules. He stated that there were no established block signals between CS tower and Crystal Lake station and considered the movement of locomotive 383 as one under flag protection, the conductor making arrangements with the operator at CS tower to hold train No. 771.

Engineman Fraley of train No. 771 stated that when his train passed CS tower the signal board indicated clear. In a few seconds after passing that place his fireman saw locomotive 383 about three car lengths ahead, and he had sufficient time only to apply the brakes and jump before the collision occurred.

Operator Woodbury, on duty at Crystal Lake station, stated that Conductor Woodworth came into the office about 9:25 a.m. and wanted to know if he could move locomotive 383 on the wye

toward CS tower for the purpose of heading in on the roundhouse track. Operator Woodbury then called up the operator at CS tower, stating that locomotive 383 would be ready to make the movement in about two minutes. The operator at CS tower replied that it would be all right to do so. He further stated that if it is desired to move a train on the wye toward CS tower when a superior train is due, it is customary to call up the operator at CS tower and have him hold the superior train, and it was his understanding that he had made such arrangements for the movement of locomotive 383.

Operator Levagood, on duty at CS tower, stated that the operator at Crystal Lake station communicated with him regarding the proposed movement of locomotive 383 and understood him to say that it would be ready to start in about 20 minutes. Train No. 771 was reported out of block A at 9:21 a.m. and he then cleared the block for that train to move to Crystal Lake station. His understanding was that locomotive 383 would come down the wye after train No. 771 had reached the station.

This accident was caused by locomotive 383 occupying the main track on the time of a superior train in violation of the rules. Locomotive 383 had no right on the main track after train No. 771 left Algonquin, and the conductor and engineman are at fault for failing to keep it in the clear until the arrival of train No. 771.

The operators at Crystal Lake station and CS tower are also at fault for attempting to make arrangements for such movements, and in any event they should not permit an inferior train to

occupy the main track on the time of a superior train unless they are absolutely certain that the superior train will be stopped before it proceeds upon that piece of track occupied by the inferior train.

Although it appeared to be the custom to make movements similar to that made by locomotive 383 on the day of the accident, in violation of the rules, such movements are always fraught with more or less danger and should not be made.

Conductor Woodworth entered the service of the Chicago & North Western Railway in 1895 as a brakeman and was promoted to be a conductor in 1902. Since that time he has been demerited and suspended several times for various reasons. The records of the other employes involved are good. At the time of the accident the crew of locomotive 383 had been on duty 14 hours and 35 minutes.