

Report No. 124 March 3, 1913.

In re investigation of accident on the Union Pacific Railroad at Valmont, Colorado

February 11, 1913.

On February 11, 1913, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Union Pacific Railroad at Valmont, Colo., resulting in the injury of 5 passengers and 3 employees

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

The Boulder Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad on which this accident occurred is a single track line, and trains are operated on this branch under the train order system. The trains involved in this collision were westbound passenger motor-car No. 22, running as train No. 171, and eastbound freight train No. 174, consisting of an engine, 5 cars and a caboose, runs from Brighton to Boulder. Conductor Mitchell and Engineman Coppice were in charge of freight train No. 174, which runs from Boulder to Denver

The collision occurred about 400 feet west of the west passing track switch at Valmont, on a two-degree reverse curve and one slight fill. At this point there is a one percent grade descending toward the east. The track is straight for about two miles west of Valmont passing track. Approaching the point where the accident occurred it is not possible to see more than 700 feet in other Direction due to the curvature of the track and on account of trees and buildings obscuring the view.

On the morning of the accident freight train No. 174 left Boulder Junction at 9:33, one hour and 33 minutes late. The distance from Boulder Junction to Valmont is 3.3 miles, and No. 171 is due at Valmont at 9:40 a.m. On this line the speed of freight trains is restricted to 20 miles per hour and of passenger trains to 30 miles per hour. Conductor Mitchell of No. 174 stated that his train stopped about 350 feet west of the passing track at 9:40 a.m. and had started to back up when it was struck by the motor car at a point 400 feet west of the west passing track switch at 9:42 a.m. He estimated that the speed of his train at the time of collision was 10 or 12 miles per hour.

Motorman Andrews of train No. 171 stated that when approaching Valmont he was on the alert, expecting to be flagged for passengers at that station, but not being flagged and arriving at a point where he could see the track was clear for some distance beyond the west switch, he stood up to do some necessary work on the gasoline engine. He stated that he was looking for train No. 174 at this station but as was two minutes late and he could see beyond the west switch, he concluded that it had not attempted to reach Valmont. While standing, owing to the shape of the roof of the car, he was able to see the track ahead for a distance of only about 300 feet. He did not see freight train No. 174 until just before the collision. His train was running at about 30 miles per hour and he did not have time to apply the brakes or shut off the engine.

When train No. 174 reached Valmont the head brakeman was riding on the pilot of the engine, and as the train came to a stop he jumped off and started ahead to flag the passenger train. He had gone a distance of only about 60 feet when he was compelled to state that he did not have a red flag and torpedoes as required by the rules of the Union Pacific Railroad and that he did not have time to put down torpedoes. A witness of the accident stated that when the freight train came to a stop the motor car was passing over the west switch of the passing track and that the engineer only had time to reverse his engine and start to back up when his train was struck.

Rule No. 69 of the Union Pacific Railroad Company reads as follows:

"At meeting points between trains of different classes the inferior train must take the siding and clear the superior train at least five minutes, and must pull into the siding when practical, If necessary to back in, the trains must first be protected as prescribed by rule 99, unless otherwise provided.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of freight train No. 174 to observe this rule. This train left Boulder Junction, 2.3 miles from Valmont, only seven minutes before the passenger train was due at Valmont, and without orders affecting the time of that train. Under the speed restriction of 30 miles per hour for freight trains, it was impossible for this train to reach Valmont and go in on the side track five minutes before the passenger train was due, as required by the rule

It appears that it is a common practice for freight trains to fail to clear passenger train No. 171 five minutes as required by the rules. A proper regard for the safety of train operation on this road could result in this rule being strictly observed

The two brakemen and the fireman on train No. 174 stated that they called attention to the fact that there was not sufficient time to reach Valmont in time to clear for No. 171. These employees are directly responsible for this accident and there can be no excuse for such dereliction of duty.

All the employees involved in this accident were experienced men and none of them was on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law