

January 10, 1912.

MEMORANDUM TO COMMISSIONER McCHORD
relative to accident on the Great Northern Railroad,
November 20, 1911.

Draft submitted by the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances
as a basis for the report of the Commission.

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On November 20, 1911, the Great Northern Railroad reported by telegraph a head-on collision occurring at Tunbridge, N. D., between west-bound freight train first No. 411 and east-bound mail train No. 28. Inspectors Merrill and Stricklan were instructed to make an investigation of this accident, and a synopsis of their report is given below.

Train No. 28, consisting of an engine, one mail car and one express car, was scheduled to leave Minot, N. D., 55 miles west of Tunbridge, at 10:20 P. M., and was on time when it approached Tunbridge, which it was due to pass at 11:50 P. M.

Train first No. 411, hauled by engine No. 1111, consisted of 44 cars and a caboose, all equipped with air-brakes. This train left Rugby, a station 4.8 miles east of Tunbridge, at 11:15 P. M., having sufficient time to go as far as Tunbridge, there to take the siding to allow No. 28 to pass. Train No. 411 did not take the siding at Tunbridge, however, but continued westward and collided with train No. 28 at a point about one-half mile beyond the west switch at Tunbridge. This colli-

sion caused the death of the engineman and fireman of train No. 28, and injuries to the conductor, brakeman, two mail clerks and one express messenger, all of train No. 28. None of the crew of train No. 411 was killed or injured.

The engine of train No. 28 was demolished, the mail car was damaged on the end next to the tender, while the express car following escaped without damage. The engine, tender and first three cars of train No. 411 were derailed and considerably damaged. At the time of the collision the speed of train No. 28 was about thirty miles per hour, while the engineman of train No. 411 saw the electric headlight of train No. 28 in time to bring his train to a stop. The headlight of train No. 411 was an oil light, and on account of the dark, stormy night, it was probable that the engineman of train No. 28 could not see it until it was too late to stop.

This division of the great Northern Railroad is a single track line and was formerly equipped with a manual block signal system. It was discontinued about four years previous to the date of the accident because the traffic did not justify its continuance, and since that time no block signal system has been in use. Had this system been in use, this accident would probably have been prevented. The track at the point of the accident is in good condition and is straight for three miles in each direction. On a clear night both trains would undoubtedly have seen each other in time to prevent the accident, but on the night in question it was cold and snowing hard; there was also a heavy wind.

In his testimony, the conductor of train No. 411

claims that before leaving Rugby he told the engineman that train No. 28 was on time, and that they should make Tunbridge for it and then go to Minot ahead of train No. 1, which is a through passenger train. Leaving Rugby the conductor rode in the caboose and when they passed Tunbridge he did not notice it. When the brakes were first applied he thought they were stopping at the east switch for the purpose of taking the siding, when as a matter of fact they had already passed the west switch and the train was being brought to a stop on account of the engineman seeing the headlight of train No. 28. Soon after the accident, this conductor disappeared.

The engineman of train No. 411 in his testimony denied having had any conversation with the conductor concerning train No. 28 before leaving Rugby. He frankly admitted that he entirely overlooked train No. 28; the only thing he was thinking about was as to how far he would be able to go for train No. 1, as the conductor had stated that he wanted to reach Minot for that train.

The fireman of train No. 411 testified that he did not hear the conversation concerning train No. 28 alleged by the conductor to have taken place before leaving Rugby. He did not know whether or not train No. 28 was on time and did not think of it after leaving Rugby. The first indication he had that they had passed Tunbridge was when he looked out of the window and saw the switch light as they passed the switch west of the station. After passing the switch the first indication he had of the approach of train No. 28 was when he stepped to the gangway and saw a light near by; he then jumped.

The head brakeman of train No. 411 was not around the engine at the time of the conversation alleged to have taken place between the conductor and engineman. He thought they had been given time on train No. 28 and that they were going to some station beyond Tunbridge to meet it.

The habits and records of all the employees concerned were good. They had had the required amount of rest before going on duty, and none of them had been on duty in excess of the statutory period.

Conductor Christian, of train No. 411, had had over three years' experience as a brakeman on this division and had been a conductor since August 18, 1909. He had been employed as a brakeman on the Montana Division before coming to the Minot Division.

Engineman Acker, of train No. 411, had had over five years' experience as an engineman, previous to which he had been a fireman for nearly three years.

This accident was caused by the crew of train first No. 411 forgetting train No. 28. The conductor and engineman in charge of this train were experienced employees and are especially at fault.

It is recommended that an adequate block signal system be installed. Had a block signal system been in use, this accident would probably have been prevented, notwithstanding the fact that the crew of train first No. 411 entirely overlocked train No. 28.

Respectfully submitted,

Chief Inspector of
Safety Appliances.