

INV. 891  
September 16, 1915.

RE: INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE COLORADO MIDLAND RAILWAY NEAR IDEL-  
WILD, COLO., ON AUGUST 27, 1915.

On August 27, 1915, there was a head-end collision on the Colorado Midland Railway near Idlewild, Colo., resulting in the injury of 33 passengers. After investigation the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

Eastbound passenger train, special No. 39, consisted of locomotive 39, 1 combination baggage and lunch car, 2 day coaches, 1 combination coach and open end observation car and 1 open top observation car, and was in charge of Conductor Baxter and Engineman Smith, all of the cars being of wooden construction. This train is known as the "The Wildflower Special," and is operated each day during July and August between Colorado Springs and Spinney, Colo., a distance of 57.7 miles, making the round trip daily and stopping at various points to allow the passengers to view the scenic attractions and gather wild flowers. During the season 1915 this train was operated under special schedule train orders each day giving it rights over all except first class trains. This train left Spinney at 12:40 p. m. and upon its arrival at Howbert, Colo., the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 51, reading as follows:

"Special 39 East will wait at Idlewild until one thirty 1:30 p.m. for No. 43 Eng. 32."

Train No. 39 then left Howbert at 1:05 p.m., passed Idlewild,

3.5 miles east of Howbert, at about 1:13 p.m., and collided with westbound train No. 43 at a point about one-half mile east of the east switch at Idlewild at 1:15 p.m. while running at a speed estimated to have been 15 miles per hour.

Westbound freight train No. 43 consisted of locomotives 36 and 32, 5 loaded cars, 36 empty cars and a caboose, and was in charge of Conductor Roberti and Enginemen Zimmitt and Brazil. This train left Colorado City, Colo., at 6:00 a.m., en route to Leadville, Colo., a distance of 136 miles, left Florissant, 32.8 miles west of Colorado City, at 11:35 a.m., and arrived at Liddersdale at about 12.30 p.m., at which place the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 51 above quoted. Train No. 43 then left Liddersdale and collided with train No. 39 as above stated while running at a speed of about 15 miles per hour.

Locomotive 39 of train No. 39 and locomotive 36, the leading engines on train No. 43, were badly damaged and their front ends raised off the track. One car loaded with merchandise was derailed and destroyed while the draft rigging and undersills of the lunch car were considerably damaged. The remainder of the equipment was not derailed and was but slightly damaged. The weather at the time was clear.

The division on which this accident occurred is a single-track line, operated under the train-order system. Approaching the point of collision from the east there is a 10-degree curve to the left, 208 feet long, then a tangent

148 feet long, then a 10-degree curve to the left, 293 feet long, the collision occurring about the middle of this latter curve and on an ascending grade of 1.64% for westbound trains. Approaching the point of collision from the west there is a 12-degree curve to the left, 173 feet long, then a tangent 147 feet long leading to the 10-degree curve on which the accident occurred. The view of the enginemen of both trains was obscured by the almost perpendicular walls of the canon on the south side of the railroad, and neither saw the opposing train until they were within approximately 100 feet of each other--too late to bring their trains to a stop before colliding.

Conductor Baxter of train No. 39 stated that on the day of the accident there were about 160 passengers on his train and that he began collecting fares upon leaving Spinney. Approaching Howbert he heard the engineman call for the train-order board and upon arriving at that station he got off the rear end of the rear car and walked to the office where he signed train order No. 51 directing his train to wait at Idlewild until 1:30 p. m. for train No. 43. He stated that he read the order aloud in the presence of his flagman and the operator and that he delivered a copy of the order to the engineman but did not read it to him. Upon leaving Howbert he again was busy collecting fares when the collision occurred, and was not aware until that time that his train had passed Idlewild.

Engineman Smith of train No. 39 stated that he received a copy of train order No. 51 at Howbert, directing his

train to wait at Idlewild until 1:30 p.m. for train No. 43, but for some reason he confused Idlewild with Lidderdale, a passing track 6.5 miles east of Idlewild. He gave the order to the fireman and the latter read it, also naming Lidderdale as the waiting point. After the accident Engineman Smith again read the order and discovered that the waiting point was plainly written as Idlewild. The only explanation he could give for misreading train order No. 51 was that leaving Howbert he was 15 minutes late on his schedule order and 1:30 p.m. at Lidderdale would make his train 10 minutes late on schedule at that point. He stated that he saw train No. 43 when it was about 150 feet away and immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, reversed the engine, and had reduced the speed of his train to about 15 miles per hour at the time of the collision. Upon being asked if there was anyone else on locomotive 39 other than the fireman and himself, Engineman Smith replied:

"Yes sir. Two ladies from Chicago. Don't know their names. They asked if they could ride when they took the picture at Idlewild, going west, and rode from there to Spinney and return on the engine."

Upon being asked if he knew it was against the rules to carry anyone other than employees in the performance of their duty on the engine, he replied:

"Yes sir, but it has been common practice to carry our passengers, ladies and gentlemen, for a short ride on the engine on this Wild Flower Train, and I have done it often on suggestion of a passenger agent and on their cards requesting such."

Fireman Neece of train No. 39 stated that he read train order No. 51 when it was given to him by Engineman

Smith and that he read it as naming Lillardale as the waiting point, and that his error in so reading it contributed to the engineman's error.

Flagman Draper of train No. 33 stated that he read train order No. 51 and understood it correctly, but when his train passed through Idlewild he had forgotten about the order.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of train No. 39 to obey train order No. 51 and wait at Idlewild until 1:30 p.m. for train No. 43.

Conductor Baxter is at fault for not requiring the engineman to read train order No. 51 back to him and knowing that the order was properly understood, as required by rule No. 810, reading in part as follows:

"The copy for each engineman, with a clearance card, must be delivered to him personally by the conductor. The engineman must read it aloud to the conductor and understand it before acting upon it."

Neither is there any excuse for the engineman and fireman of train No. 39 reading the word Lillardale instead of Idlewild into the order.

Engineman Smith is also at fault for permitting the two women to ride in the cab of his engine; yet it appears that it was the common practice to permit unauthorized persons to do so, frequently upon the request of the railroad officials themselves. Such a practice can not be too strongly condemned, this being especially so on a line or railroad of this character with heavy mountain grades and almost continuous curves where

employees should give their entire attention to the handling of their train.

Conductor Dexter was employed as a brakeman in 1883, promoted to conductor in 1900, and has a clear record. Engineer Smith was employed as an engineman in 1886 and was the oldest engineman on the entire line in point of service with an almost faultless record, and was considered one of the most capable and careful employees.

All of the other employees <sup>involved</sup> had good records and none had been on duty in violation of the hours of service law.