

BLAME ENGINEER FOR WESTFIELD DISASTER

Jersey Central Officials' Testimony at Coroner's Inquest.

Eye Witnesses Corroborate Davis's Dying Statement That Clouds of Steam Obscured His Vision.

Special to The New York Times.

PLAINFIELD, N. J., Feb. 5.—That large volumes of steam escaped from Engine No. 27, which caused the wreck on the New Jersey Central Railroad near Westfield, was testified to by half a dozen eyewitnesses before the Coroner's jury this afternoon. That the steam obscured his vision was the excuse offered by James Davis, the engineer, for not paying attention to the block signals at Cranford and Westfield. The efforts of Michael Meaney, the train dispatcher at Jersey City, to prevent a catastrophe were recounted by him in the course of an examination conducted by Prosecutor English and the foreman of the jury, ex-Mayor Charles J. Fisk. The final hearing will be held to-morrow afternoon. This will allow the jury to shape its report in time for the Union County Grand Jury to take up its task on Monday morning.

The railroad men endeavored to shift the blame to the dead engineer, though admission was made that clouds of steam filled the cab and covered the front cars. No evidence was produced to show that torpedoes were placed on the tracks by the rear brakeman of the Easton local when the stop was made west of Westfield to cool a hot journal. That point was dwelt upon at length by the County Prosecutor.

"Do you think this accident would have occurred if torpedoes had been placed on the track?" General Manager Bester was asked.

"That is a matter of conjecture," promptly replied the official, "but I believe that the engineer was the cause of this accident."

He declared that he considered placing torpedoes unnecessary under the conditions, and quoted from the company's rules to sustain his opinion.

Mrs. Emma Harkzen, opposite whose home the fatal accident occurred, and who witnessed it, declared that she did not see any one go back from the local with a lantern, nor did she hear any torpedoes.

Station Master Schultze of Cranford testified that he had placed a red light on the tracks before the flier passed, but no attention was paid to it. He noticed an unusual amount of steam escaping from the engine as it sped by. The engine and two cars were completely covered by these clouds, according to the testimony of Jonathan P. Glasby of Elizabeth, who watched the train as it passed through that city.

The telegraph operator at Cranford, John B. Eick, declared that a danger light was placed on the tracks fully five minutes before the train passed. After the flier passed Cranford an effort was made to stop it at the Broad Street crossing, Westfield, where William Berson, flagman, waved a red lantern to and fro on the tracks. Berson swore that he stayed on the track as long as he dared to, but that this was not the only instance in which he had failed to stop a train by such means.

Policeman Knapp told how he had found Davis lying on the ground near the engine.

"I asked him if he saw the red light," said the witness. He declared that Davis's voice was hardly audible, but he distinctly heard him say, "I saw the red light. I expected it to turn white."

Policeman Young corroborated that testimony, and added: "He said to me that he had left Jersey City eighteen minutes late, and had been told that he had a clear track ahead."

Homer Smith and Stephen Arthur Krom, both of this city, who were passengers on the Easton local, told of the wreck. "I heard Davis say, 'I told him I could not see,'" declared Mr. Krom, the 'him' referred to being the fireman.

Mr. Krom is a manufacturer of machinery, and Juror Gavet questioned him as to the efficiency of the work done on the engine when in the repair shop. It had been related at the previous session that the split steam chest in the right cab of the engine had been repaired by bolts.

"The steam chest was probably cold when the repairs were made. These bolts would expand and become loose before long. The bolts would expand beyond their elasticity, and therefore become strained," was the statement of Mr. Krom.

According to Edward McEwen, the conductor of the express, his train left Jersey City at 6:14 o'clock, being three minutes late. No special instructions had been given him when departing, and he followed the time table. After the crash he hunted up Davis, who said: "I could not see them for steam."

McEwen declared that when the engine was given to them on the run east on the morning of the fatal accident, a freight engineer at Trenton said that it was a "bum" engine to make speed with.

The examination of Michael H. Meaney, the train dispatcher, was prolonged. He was on duty at Jersey City and had charge of the service between that place and Somerville on the night of the wreck. Because the fourth track was blockaded by a freight train between Westfield and Garwood he decided to send the Easton train to Dunellen on track No. 2 instead of running it over to track No. 4 at Cranford Junction, as was usually done, in order to allow the Philadelphia flyer to pass it there. An order to that effect was sent to the Easton local at Elizabeth. At 6:25 o'clock he sent orders to Cranford for the Philadelphia flyer to pass the other train at Dunellen. This, he said, was done because the flyer made no stop at Elizabeth. Two minutes later he received word from the Cranford operator that the flyer had passed that point and had failed to take the order. As quick as possible he telegraphed Westfield and the operator there replied that the Philadelphia train was "passing."

The train dispatcher declared that the block signals were depended upon, but that messages were sent out as an extra precaution. He knew that a freight blocked track No. 4 before the Philadelphia express left Jersey City, but no orders were given there, because of a rule of the company. This rule, he explained, is that orders are to be sent to the point nearest where they are to take effect.

William S. Armstrong of Elizabeth, formerly an engineer in the employ of the company, testified that it is sometimes impossible to see out of an engine cab because of escaping steam. His view had been obscured in this manner many times, he declared, but an engineer is required to run under this condition.

The repairs made to engine No. 27 during the fore part of January were explained to the jury by G. A. Smeltzer, roundhouse foreman, of Philadelphia, who produced the book in which these repairs were entered. He was satisfied that the locomotive was not leaking on Jan. 27, although he had not seen it.

General Manager Bester explained at great length the system of electro-pneumatic signals, and told how they operated just before the wreck occurred. He declared as absurd the statement that the engineer was patted on the back "who could run past danger signals successfully."

Mr. Bester assured the jury that it is the duty of an engineer to consider a signal unseen as a red one. Failure to obey the signals is followed by speedy dismissal. Foreman Fisk made a request of Mr. Bester that the jury be given an opportunity to receive a practical illustration of the block signal system.

"I will gladly produce all the conditions," responded Bester.

"Except the crash," protested Juror Woodhill.

A special train will be given the jurors to-morrow evening to make a trip over the place of the disaster. Engine 26, which is similar to engine 27, destroyed in the wreck, will be sent here for the use of the jurymen.

The testimony of Fireman James McCarthy will be received by the jury at the hospital to-morrow afternoon and remaining witnesses will be heard subsequently.

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