

William Buchanan

(- 26 Feb 1895)

Buchanan. Suddenly on February 25, 1895, William only son of Elizabeth Buchanan, aged 16 years. Funeral will take place from 1332 Union street southwest on Friday at 2 o'clock.

The Evening Star, February 27, 1895

Will Hold an Inquest

This afternoon Coroner Hammett visited the undertaking establishment of J. Wm. Lee and reviewed the body of William Buchanan, the 16-year-old boy who was drowned in James creek canal at an early hour yesterday morning. After hearing statements concerning the circumstances in which the unfortunate boy walked into the unprotected death trap, the coroner thought there should be an investigation made, and in order to fix the responsibility where it belongs he will hold an inquest at noon tomorrow.

The Evening Star, February 28, 1895

Before the Coroner

Investigating the Death of Young William Buchanan Drowned in the James Creek Canal--Mysterious Features of the Affair--Cries of Murder

Today at noon at J. William Lee's undertaking establishment on Pennsylvania avenue Coroner Hammett held an inquest in the case of the boy William Buchanan, who was drowned in the James Creek canal about 1 o'clock Tuesday morning, as printed in The Star at the time. Policemen Purks and Bruce, who fished the body from the death trap, were present as was a young man named Charles Lippard, with whom the deceased had been during the evening before he met the fatal accident. On the stone wall near where the body was found, someone, probably the dead boy, had vomited, and the hat was also found there, indicating that he had stopped on the coping before he took the fatal step.

The fourth precinct officers had summoned a jury, composed of J.E Crump, V.C. Woodbridge, M.F. Rue, T.P. Lightfoot, B.P. Vernon and W.J. Shepperson, and these men viewed the body in Undertaker Lee's morgue before listening to the evidence. The members of the jury reside in South Washington, and are fully aware of the dangers attending the death trap in which the deceased lost his life.

Before the first witness was called the coroner excluded reporters and others from the room, as he did not want the public to know what he had to say to the jury. In his short talk to the men it is thought that he had something to say about the dangerous placed called a canal.

Testimony Submitted

Robert Coleman, a colored man, was then called and examined. He lives at 1216 1st street southwest, about 100 yards from the canal. He testified that about 1 o'clock Tuesday morning his wife around him and said she had heard someone calling "murder." Witness got out of bed and when he heard the cry repeated he went to the canal. There was a man named Smith standing on the bridge and another man on an old scow.

"Could he have walked in the canal?" a juror asked.

"It was the most natural thing for him to do," replied witness. "There is no fence along the canal."

Witness, resuming, said that after he had left the house and was on his way to the canal he heard the drowning boy call, "For God's sake save me."

The man on the scow told him about where the boy had gone in, and witness helped to take his body out of the water.

There were no piles of sand near there. On the shore, he said, the boy's had was found, and there was also the odor of beer or whisky where someone had vomited.

Another Witness

Richard Smith, the colored man whom the previous witness said was on the bridge when he reached there, was next called. He said he was on his way home from work Tuesday morning, and when near South Capitol street he heard a cry of "help." He went directly to the bridge, and when he reached there he saw a woman on the bridge and two men on a scow with poles trying to get the body.

"Was the woman white or colored?"

"Colored woman."

He denied that he had had any conversation with the witness Coleman. Witness said he could not render any assistance, as he could not reach the scow.

Heard the Cries

Samuel Wilson, an old colored man, was next called.

Wilson testified that he was aroused by the noise, and he heard the cries of the drowning boy, but could not say that he cried "murder".

The boy continued his cries for some time, but his voice became weaker, and finally ceased. One man reached there ahead of him and told him just where the boy went down. Witness was the first one to get on the scow and Coleman came soon afterward.

Witness said he smelled the odor of strong drink around.

Sarah Mayo, colored, 1216 1st street southeast testified that she heard the boy's cries of "help," but did not hear him cry "murder." When witness opened the door she saw a man standing on the bridge with his hands in his pockets.

Was With Him

Charles Lippard was next examined. He knew William Buchanan, who was an intimate friend of his. Monday night witness said he remained at Mrs. Buchanan's house until William came home, and after supper they went out together. When Buchanan came home he was under the influence of liquor. This was about 7:20.

During the evening they stood on street corners along Pennsylvania avenue, and when they reached his (witness') house it was about twenty minutes of 12 o'clock, more than an hour before Buchanan was drowned.

Witness said good night to him and they parted. Witness went in the house, and Buchanan started in the direction of his home. He could not understand how Buchanan got so far east as the canal.

During the five hours they were together Buchanan did not drink anything, said the witness.

The witness was closely questioned by members of the jury, but he repeated that Buchanan did not take a drink while with him Monday night.

The Boy's Mother

Mrs. Elizabeth Buchanan, mother of the drowned boy, was called, and she said that her son had always been a good boy. On one occasion, sometime last summer, when he was out with Lippard, he had something to drink. That was the only time she had ever known him to remain out late and give her

any uneasiness. She said she had told him to keep away from Lippard. Saturday night, she said, she gave him \$1 for lunch money for the week, and she knew he had some other change.

Mrs. Buchanan said she had an idea that her boy had been in a scuffle on the bridge. She could not account for his presence about the canal and said she thought he did not go there alone, as he was afraid.

Mrs. Buchanan was questioned by the jurors concerning her son's associates and his character, and she charged that other boys had led him astray. She told of one occasion when the boys were in a colored man's house and had beer, and Lippard's father found them there.

Good Character

Mr. A.F. Morgan, shoe dealer, for whom the deceased worked, testified to the good character of the deceased.

"He's always been a good boy," said Mr. Moran, "and we thought a good deal of him."

"Did you ever suspect that he drank?"

"No, sir. I have heard of his refusing liquor."

Monday night he left the store about ten minutes before 7 o'clock, and it was thought it would take him more than twenty minutes to get home.

"And Lippard says he was drunk at 7:30," the coroner remarked.

"I don't see how he could have got drunk in that time unless he was drugged," said Mr. Moran.

Mysterious Man

Samuel S. Wall testified that he was at home when he heard a cry of "murder," and following this came the cry of "help." Witness was the first man to reach the place. He saw a man walking along the street going from the bridge and he turned down 2d street. Witness was satisfied that the man must have heard the cries.

The coroner thought it rather strange that the man should have walked away from there under the circumstances.

Witness said that when this man turned down 2d street he saw the officers coming.

"Then," remarked the coroner, "the man may have seen the officers."

Frank Cowns testified that he heard the screams in the direction of the bridge. He walked up 2d street to M, but did not meet the man seen walking from the direction of the bridge. He did not reach the canal until after the police had arrived there.

Accidental Death

The jury, after the evidence had been completed, retired and rendered a verdict of accidental death. A recommendation was made that some safeguards be placed along the banks of the canal to prevent loss of life.