

Richard J. Eckert

(- 30 Oct 1903)

The Evening Star, October 19, 1903, p. 6

Down With Crash

Part of the Long Bridge Draw Wrecked Under Train's Weight

Several Persons' Believed to Have Been Drowned

Remarkable Escape From Wholesale Disaster--

Searching the Debris and Dragging the River

The express train on the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad, known as the "F.F.V." that left the 6th street station last night at 11:22 o'clock put the Long bridge out of business. Because of the heavy weight of the train the north half of the draw went down and part of the train went with it. One man, Richard J. Eckart, who was employed as assistant draw tender, is missing, and it is the belief of railroad men and policemen that he and several others lost their lives. ...

The Evening Star, October 20, 1903, p. 11

Traffic Resumed

Trains Now Running Over The Long Bridge

Work Was Pushed All Night and a Single Track Completed

...No attention was paid by the railroad men to the matter of searching for the bodies of supposed victims of the disaster, but Harbormaster Sutton's crew attended to it. The river was dragged about the bridge, but up to this afternoon no sign of a body had been found. It was rumored that the diver had seen two or three bodies on the bottom of the river while he was examining the tender, but he denied that there was any truth in it. It is still the opinion of the police and railroad men that two tramps were drowned in addition to Richard Eckart, the assistant bridge tender. ...

The Evening Star, October 21, 1903, p. 2

Long Bridge Open

Repairs Quickly Made and Traffic Resumed

Search Being Made for Body of Missing Man--

Closing of the Chanel

...

Harbormaster Sutton was about the vicinity of the bridge this morning with his crew, and an effort was made to recover the body of Richard Eckart, the only man who is known to be missing, although it is thought that two or three tramps may also have lost their lives at the time of the accident. Only the hat of Eckart, who was assistant to the engineer in charge of the draw, has been found. The crew of the police boat, who made an effort to drag for the body, found the task a difficult one on account of the amount of wreckage in the river. Arrangements were made to have Capt. Winters, the diver in the employ of the railroad company, go down this afternoon and search for the body. ...

The Evening Star, October 22, 1903

Eckart Still Missing

Unsuccessful Search for His Body in the Potomac

Hundreds of teams hauling brick from the several yards in Virginia below Jackson City have passed over the Long bridge since 9 o'clock yesterday morning, when the work of restoring the wagon road was completed. There were so many teams on the bridge all yesterday and last night that the services of policemen were needed to prevent collision and confusion. There was a big crowd of spectators yesterday afternoon to see Captain Winter go down in his diving suit. He went through the baggage car and tender under the water, but failed to find the body of Richard Eckart, the only man known to be missing. He was enabled to give information, however, which assisted the men in charge of the work of taking sections of the bridge from the water.

The heavy machinery on the pile drivers was used for this purpose, but some of the heavy timbers and iron were so tightly fastened that they could not be budged. Harbor Master Sutton's crew of policemen also made every effort to find the body by using hooks, but without being successful. It is thought the body of the missing man may be held down by the mass of debris in the water, and that it will be found after this has been removed.

Today the work of searching for the body of the missing man was renewed. Should the body be found the coroner will probably hold an inquest, at which testimony regarding the condition of the Long bridge may be of an interesting nature.

The Evening Star, October 29, 1903, p. 5

Mrs. Eckert's Appeal

Wants Greater Effort Made to Recover Her Husband's Remains

Commissioner Macfarland today received a visit from Mrs. Richard Eckert, whose husband is supposed to have been killed under the wreck of the Long bridge draw recently. Mr. Eckert was the draw tender at the Long bridge.

Mrs. Eckert requested Mr. Macfarland to aid her in recovering the remains of her husband and complained of the delay in finding the body. The Commissioner told her he had the greatest sympathy for her and would do anything he could to help her, but that he believed every effort is being made to recover the body as quickly as possible. However, he telephoned the harbor master and the general agent of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, asking them to continue the search, and get out the remains as quickly as practicable.

Both of these gentlemen assured Mr. Macfarland that they are doing all that could be done and would continue to do so. The harbor master is using all the means at his command. The general agent of the railroad has had two divers at work. But both thought that, until the removal of the wreckage now in progress is completed, the remains may not be recovered.

Mrs. Eckert told Mr. Macfarland that by the death of her husband she is left without support for herself and two children, and is in needy circumstances.

The Evening Star, October 30, 1903, p. 2

Inquest to Be Held

Remains of Richard Eckert Recovered From River

Coroner Nevitt will hold an inquest at the sixth precinct police station tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock, at which time testimony will be taken with a view to determining the cause of the Long Bridge disaster. The inquest will be held over the body of Richard J. Eckert, the draw tender, who lost his life at the time the draw collapsed. His body was recovered this morning, after having been in the water about eleven days.

Peter Cavanaugh was in a small boat gathering driftwood about one-eighth of a mile east of the bridge, in the Georgetown channel, about 8:30 o'clock this morning, when he discovered Eckert's body

floating about in the water. After securely fastening the body to the wall about the flats he went to the harbor office and informed Harbor Master Sutton of his discovery. The police boat was dispatched to the place where the body was fastened and the body was removed to the wharf at the foot of 6th street.

Mrs. Eckert was summoned to the wharf, where the body had been placed in a metallic casket, and she promptly identified the remains as those of her husband.

The body was badly swollen and discolored, and the condition of the clothing indicated that Eckert had met with violence before he reached the water. His garments had been torn about his right hip, and there was so much mud on the body that it was impossible to see just what injuries had been inflicted. The extent of the investigation to be made tomorrow will probably be to determine something concerning the condition of the bridge, and what, if any, effort has been made to make the structure safe.

It is probable that War Department officials will be called upon to render assistance, and that testimony of practical bridge workers will be heard to determine the condition of the broken timbers after the accident occurred.

The Evening Star, October 31, 1903, p. 7

Hearing Incomplete

Coroner's Investigation of Long Bridge Accident

The Evidence Heard

Further Inquiry Postponed Until Next Week

The Death of Richard J. Eckert, an Employee of Railway Company, Subject of Inquiry

A searching inquiry was made today by a jury of inquest impaneled by Coroner Nevitt regarding the death of Richard J. Eckert, the watchman who lost his life at the time the draw of the Long bridge collapsed under the weight of a Chesapeake and Ohio railroad train nearly two weeks ago. ...

Deputy Coroner's Statement

The first evidence heard was the statement of Deputy Coroner Glazebrook. He found that the death of the draw tender was due to drowning. The only evidence of violence found about the body was a fracture of the right foot. The doctor discovered that the clothing over both hips was torn. ...

Was With the Draw Tender

George Heins, a boat builder and ship carpenter, testified that he was in the house with Mr. Eckert the night the accident occurred. He was building a boat for Eckert, and frequently called to see him on the bridge. He reached there Sunday night about 8 o'clock, more than three hours before the crash came. Just before Eckert went out to flag the train he complained of having a headache. The engineer of the train responded to the flagging. When the engine reached the draw and the crash was heard all started out of the little house. Eckert was the first to run out. The other men, Captain Giles and Frank Howard, climbed over the train. Witness was unable to climb, and managed to crawl to a place of safety. It was the opinion of witness that a falling timber struck Eckert and knocked him overboard.

Witness said Eckert left the house several seconds before he (witness) got out. ...

The Evening Star, November 14, 1903, p. 9

Jury's Inquiry Ends

Coroner's Investigation of Long Bridge Accident

Verdict Rendered

Richard J. Eckert's Death As Result of Collapse

The P. W. and B. Railway Company Held Responsible for Unsafe Condition of the Bridge

The investigation of the death of Richard J. Eckert, the watchman on the Long bridge, who was drowned at the time of the bridge disaster, when the draw gave way under the weight of a Chesapeake and Ohio railroad train, was resumed by the coroner's jury today. The accident occurred the night of October 19, and the body of the victim was recovered several days later. A number of witnesses were examined at the first session of the jury and the hearing was postponed for the purpose of getting information concerning what, if any action, had been taken by the War Department officials concerning the condition of the structure and also for the purpose of establishing the question of responsibility. Evidence was heard and the jury returned a verdict as follows:

"We, the jury find that Richard J. Eckert came to his death by drowning on the 18th day of October, in the Potomac river, in the collapse of the draw of that bridge on that date.

"We further believe that the accident resulting in his death was caused by the unsafe condition of the timbers composing the draw, for the condition of which the Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington Railway Company is responsible."