

Walter R. Hopkins (- 5 Sep 1903)

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Only One Shot

Enough for Walter R. Hopkins Purposes

Suicide From Melancholia -- Identifying the Body --

Had Been in Asylum

An insane desire to become wealthy through his bicycle inventions is the only motive up to this time advanced as prompting the suicide Saturday afternoon of Mr. Walker R. Hopkins, who, until recently was a local letter carrier. The rash deed was committed on a footpath running from the Chain bridge station on the Cabin John bridge electric line to the river. The unfortunate man recently underwent treatment at St. Elisabeth's Asylum for the Insane and resided with his family at 321 13th street northwest.

Shortly after 2 o'clock Saturday afternoon the report of a pistol shot rang out in the vicinity of the Chain Bridge. The echoes of the shot were heard in all the recesses of the rocks and hills of the river at that point and caused some alarm among persons who happened to be in the vicinity, Howard Moten, Edward Jones and Joseph Parker, all colored, of Hall's Hill, Va., who are employed at Smith's stone crusher, heard the shot and immediately thereafter started an investigation. As they proceeded up the little path from the Chain bridge they beheld in the distance the form of a man stretched on the ground. Being convinced that the report of the pistol came from the spot where the man lay the colored men hurried to the home of a Mr. Rollins, a short distance away. Mr. Rollins was not at home, but his wife asked a man named Ferguson, who happened along, to render what assistance he could to the colored men.

The four men then approached the form lying on the ground. It could be seen that the man was dead. His mouth was wide open. In the roof of the mouth could be seen a small hole, and at a point near the center of the top of the head was another hole, showing that the deadly bullet had found its way through the skull. On the ground beside the lifeless body lay a 38-caliber revolver of the bulldog pattern. It was warm from recent discharge. While this hurried examination of the body was being made Mr. Ferguson went to the High View Hotel, at the Virginia end of the Chain bridge, and, after some little delay, connection was made with the seventh precinct police station, in Georgetown. The message was to the effect that an unknown white man had committed suicide at the point above named.

Identifying the Body

The police of the seventh precinct then communicated with the authorities at the morgue. In the meantime the patrol wagon of the police station was dispatched to the scene of the tragedy and the body was brought to the Georgetown station, from which point it was taken to the morgue by Morguemaster Shoenberger. Up to this time the identity of the unfortunate man was a mystery. At the morgue Mr. Shoenberger began a search of the clothing of the dead man to find something which might enable the authorities to clear up the mystery of the suicide. In the trouser pockets were found one dollar and nineteen cents in money and an illegible pawn ticket, signed "W.R.H.," and in the coat pocket was discovered an envelope addressed to "W.R. Hopkins, Carter Station B." The clue to the man's identity was confirmed later Saturday evening by Mr. C.E. Campbell, a brother-in-law, who is also employed as a letter carrier.

With the exception of the fact that he talked incoherently about his inventions, there was nothing in Hopkins' demeanor Saturday which would have led any one to believe that he contemplated ending his

existence. He ate a hearty breakfast Saturday morning and about 10:30 o'clock, after kissing his wife good-bye, left the family home on 13th street southeast, explaining that he would be back to dinner. It is said that he tried to get work at a grocery near by, but his effort was in vain.

Being despondent, it is thought, he decided to put an end to his life, and with funds secured by pawning a trinket bought the revolver with which he committed suicide.

The unfortunate man is said to have suffered from melancholia, which, together with his desire to become rich, had unsettled his brain. Last July Hopkins resigned his position at the Post office. His peculiar actions with a bicycle resulted in his arrest, with the outcome that he was committed to St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the Insane. Hopkins seemed perfectly rational the majority of the time while at the institution and was paroled that he might visit his home from time to time. On such a visit last Tuesday he expressed the belief that he had greatly improved and would make application for reinstatement in the government service. He did so and it is said, was informed that, if he could produce a certificate from the hospital authorities he would have his desired granted.

Upon learning the circumstances attending Hopkins' death, Coroner Nevitt issued a death certificate from suicide and ordered the remains turned over to the family. Hopkins was a native of Maryland and is survived to a wife and two children.