

Robert McLennan

(- 7 Jul 1927)

The Evening Star, July 4, 1927, p. 2

Three Autoists Pinned Under Car

Auto Collides With Detective Fihelly's Machine and Driver is Arrested

Three persons were pinned under their overturned automobile this morning after colliding at Seventh and D streets with a car driven by Detective Arthur T. Fihelly of the ninth precinct, who arrested Robert McLennan, 46 years old, 1416 N street, driver of the car which sideswiped him. Fihelly charged him with operating a car while under the influence of liquor.

Imprisoned Parties Rescued

The crash of the accident served as an alarm to firemen of No. 14 Engine Company, just around the corner on Eighth street, who reached the scene in time to pull the car from McLennan and his companions, 710 Thirty-first street southeast, and his son, 12-year-old Arthur Padgett, jr.

Deputy Chief P.W. Nicholson sent for the rescue squad from No. 2 Company and was just about to place the trio in the wagon and send them to the hospital when the Emergency ambulance arrived.

List of the Injured

Examination disclosed that McLennan sustained a wrenched back, Arthur Padgett was cut about the head and his boy was shocked and bruised; Detective Fihelly was cut about the right leg, but did not go to the hospital.

Fihelly stated that he was going east on D street and had crossed the Seventh street car tracks when the car driven by McLennan travelling at a high rate of speed, struck his car in the rear, spinning him completely around twice and throwing his car on the sidewalk. A gallon of liquor was found in the overturned machine, police said.

The Evening Star, July 7, 1927, p. 1

Motorist Dies After Hitting Officer's Car

Collision Monday Results Fatally. Coroner Orders Inquest Tomorrow

Robert McLennan, 46 years old, of 305 C street, died at Gallinger Hospital today from injuries sustained in a collision between his automobile and an automobile operated by Precinct Detective Arthur T. Fihelly of the ninth precinct, at Seventh and D streets, Monday morning.

McLennan was taken to the first precinct for investigation after the collision, and upon recommendation of physicians was removed to Gallinger Hospital for treatment of rib fractures and spinal injuries. His death was caused by the latter.

An inquest into the death will be conducted by Coroner J. Ramsay Nevitt at the District Morgue.

The Evening Star, July 8, 1927, p. 2

Auto Crash Death Held Accidental

Coroner's Jury Exonerates Hospital Doctor and Police in McLennan Probe

A verdict of accidental death was returned by a coroner's jury at the District Morgue today in the case of Robert McLennan, 46-year-old stone mason, who died yesterday at Gallinger Hospital from injuries sustained in a collision at Seventh and D streets Monday between his automobile and a machine operated by Precinct Detective Arthur Fihelly. The verdict exonerated Fihelly from blame in the collision

and Dr. A.M. Preece of Emergency Hospital from imputations of negligence in his subsequent treatment of McLennan.

Deputy Coroner Herbert E. Martyn, testified that the cause of death was “tortion, or twisting of the neck vertebrae.” He declared it would be difficult from outward appearances to detect the injury, and that at the autopsy only the looseness around the neck led him to discover by post mortem examination the twisting of the vertebrae there which had caused partial paralysis and death three days after the accident.

He testified that there were no broken ribs or other bones and that examination of the stomach failed to indicate presence of alcohol.

Incarcerated After Crash

The inquest assumed importance today when it was learned that McLennan had first been examined by Dr. A.M. Preece at Emergency Hospital immediately after the accident. Following the examination McLennan had been transferred to the first precinct, where he lay in a cell for four hours under a charge of driving an automobile while intoxicated. At the end of that time, police reported, the Emergency Hospital was summoned again and after a second examination by Dr. Preece, who declared that nothing wrong could be found other than apparent effects of alcoholic indulgence by the patient, McLennan was removed to Gallinger Hospital late Monday.

When McLennan died at Gallinger Hospital yesterday morning it was believed that a broken spine was the cause of his death and a report on the case was immediately ordered by Maj. Edwin B. Hesse, chief of police.

The first witness to take the stand at the inquest today was Dr. H.M. Glaubman of Gallinger Hospital. He said that upon admission to Gallinger Hospital on the afternoon of July 4 McLennan complained of severe pains in the back of his neck. He showed no reflex action and was incapable of feeling heat, cold or pains. His sense of feeling was gone, Dr. Glaubman said. Two sets of X-ray plates had been taken at the hospital, which failed to show the cause of the trouble, although indications of injuries about the neck were vaguely present.

There was no evidence of alcoholism, Dr. Glaubman said.

The patient, he added, could not walk or stand up. Dr. Preece next took the stand. He detailed his examination of McLennan at the scene of the accident, as well as his examination at the hospital and in the first precinct station house. He looked for an injury to the spine and failed to find it. Dr. Preece said. McLennan had the use of his arms and legs at all times, when Dr. Preece examined him, according to the witness, and the odor of alcohol was present on his breath.

“There were no signs of paralysis,” Dr. Preece said. “I told the officers I thought the stuff he had had knocked him out. To me it appeared he was intoxicated, although it is hard to say exactly when a person is intoxicated. I gave permission for his transfer to the first precinct.”

Four hours after the transfer to the precinct upon being summoned again, Dr. Preece testified he still thought the condition of McLennan was due to something he drank, but he stated that he told the police it would be “better to play safe and take him to Gallinger.” That ended his connection with the case.

Passenger in Car Testifies

Arthur Padgett, 710 Thirty-first street southeast, who was riding in McLennan’s car July 4, when the accident occurred, testified that he had met July 3 McLennan in a place near Seventh and O streets, where cider was sold. He was not a close friend, Padgett said, and although he scarcely knew the man, McLennan nevertheless had stayed with Padgett at his home over night. On the following morning, July 4, Padgett said he, his 12-year-old son, and McLennan went out for a ride in the latter’s automobile, and McLennan had obtained some more cider. He said they both had been drinking before the accident. He

added that McLennan was going south on Seventh street at about 30 miles an hour in his automobile just before the crash with Fihelly's car at D street.

McLennan was indicted and subsequently acquitted in connection with the deaths of John Craven, 55-year-old huckster, and Hammen Eskridge, a Virginia truck farmer, who were drowned December 26, 1923, when the automobile in which they were riding with McLennan dove off the speedway at the entrance to the narrow bridge over the inlet from the Potomac River to the Tidal Basin.

Policemen who dragged McLennan from the icy water of the Potomac testified at that time that they smelled alcohol on his breath but C.W. Stallard of the Emergency Hospital staff, who treated him, declared that he had not detected any evidence of liquor. McLennan declared the steering wheel of his machine must have locked as he tried to steer out of the path of an approaching automobile that was crossing the one-way bridge at the time he neared the entrance. He denied also that he was speeding. The bodies of Craven and Eskridge later were recovered from the automobile submerged in 25 feet of water.