

Morris C. Wheeler

(- 10 Aug 1896)

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Body In The River

Floating Corpse Found in the Potomac Near Great Falls Identified As M.C. Wheeler

A Young Employe of the Smithsonian, Lately Despondent Funeral Arrangements

The body of an unknown man found yesterday in the Potomac river about two miles below Great Falls was identified this morning as that of Maurice C. Wheeler, a son of A.M. Wheeler, an employe in the office of the Controller of the currency. The identification was made by the father of the boy, but the body was in such a bad state of decomposition that the father at first did not recognize the corpse. He, however, recognized the silver watch which was taken from the body of the drowned man, and on closer examination identified the shoes, stockings and pants which clothed the lower extremities of the floating object.

Left Home on August 10

The young man left his home at 1313 6th street Monday morning, August 10, at 7 o'clock, since which time his friends have never seen him. He left his home with a bundle of laundry, and the last place he was known to enter was a branch laundry house on 7th street. He left this place at about 8 o'clock in the morning, and nothing more was known or heard of him until the identification of the body this morning. The father of the boy, who has been anxiously searching for his whereabouts since his disappearance, after reading the description of the body found at the Great Falls yesterday, felt quite certain it was that of his missing son. In company with a friend, he started out in a buggy this morning, only to find that his suspicions were verified, and the body that of his son.

Probably Temporary Insanity

Young Wheeler was not quite twenty-one years of age, and his father attributes his self-destruction to a temporary attack of insanity. Last September, a year ago, while engaged in sport, the boy was overcome by the heat, his mind being affected. He was confined to the Bloomindale Asylum for a period of three months, since which time he has been living with his parents. Of late his actions were not unusual, and his parents were glad, thinking he was all right again. The family has been living at 1313 6th street up to a short time ago, when they moved out to Riverdale, Md. Young Wheeler was attached to the people who remained in the house, the family of Mrs. Hough, and he stayed with them.

A Farewell Note

Saturday, the 8th instant, young Wheeler called at the residence of Dr. J.T. Winter on 9th street. The next day Dr. Winter received the following message by special delivery mail:

"Dear Doctor: When this reaches you I shall in all events be resting beneath the water near a rock on the Virginia side of the river above the Aqueduct bridge.

"Yours, M.C. Wheeler."

A Postal Card

With the same mail Dr. Winter received a postal card, in which the writer stated that he was in an unfortunate frame of mind, and to please take no notice of the contents of the letter. Though Dr.

Winter received these letters Sunday afternoon, he did not tell the father of the boy about their receipt until the following Friday. Mr. A.M. Wheeler, the father of the boy is considerably incensed over the action of the physician, for had he received the letters immediately, he says, he could have prevented his son from leaving his home, as the boy did not leave until the next morning. He said that when he asked Dr. Winter why he had not been notified sooner, the physician replied that it was not in the line of his professional duty to do so. According to Mr. Wheeler, Dr. Winter acknowledged that the boy was not in his right mind when he called on him Saturday afternoon.

Other Notes

Monday morning Mr. Wheeler received the following postal card from his son:

"Papa, I have not much strength, you know, and I am not well. I am overcome.

"Your son, MORRIS

A brother of the drowned boy, living at Indian Head, Md., received the following the same morning:

"Dear Artie: Will you write to papa and Rosebud, telling them that it is all right with me, and not to bother. If you do not want this bill, burn it."

Seemed to Change His Mind

In the same mail both parties received a postal card, which stated: "In the same mail with this you will receive a letter which was written while I was in an unfortunate frame of mind; please take no notice of it."

Where the young man has been since his disappearance nobody knows, and no one can tell how he reached the place where his body was found.

Discovery of the Body

The body was discovered by Thomas Jackson of the Great Falls Hotel, and from its position it was evidently a clear case of suicide. The corpse was found floating between two rocks in the first eddy above what is known as "catfish hole," which is fully two miles from Great Falls, and at a point near the river directly opposite the Anglers' Club House. Mr. Jackson was hunting for a fishing spot at the time, and as soon as he found the body he notified Deputy Sheriff Wm. R. Embrey.

An Inquest

Shortly after 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon an inquest was held over the body by Justice of the Peace Luther M. Offutt.

The jury consisted of Ernest Wheatley, foreman; Harry Morgal, Arty Fisher, E.G. Fisher, Alexander Hill, Levi Hill, Thomas Bodine, James Bodine, Thomas Jackson, Val Collier, William T. Lynch and Richard Anderson. There was no evidence outside that of Thomas Jackson, who discovered the body, and a verdict of death by drowning was returned.

Body in a Bad State

The body was in a terrible state of decomposition, and had evidently been in the water for ten days or more. All of the flesh had disappeared from the head, leaving only the bare skull. The hands had entirely dropped off, leaving only the bones in the arm.

Means of Identification

The body was so badly discolored that it was hard to tell whether it was that of a white or colored man. When searched a silver watch, with the initials "M.C.W." engraved on it a night latch key and three car tickets were all that was found, and these were turned over to the father this morning. A

package of cigarettes was also found in one of the pockets, though the father stated that the boy never smoked them.

For the Burial

A rough box was constructed by Mr. Bissett, and the Montgomery county officials were to have interred the body this morning had not the father appeared on the scene and claimed the body. Undertaker Wright was notified and he started out this afternoon for the Falls to secure the body.

On account of its condition it is probable that no time will be lost in making the interment, which will be made at Oak Hill cemetery. Morris Wheeler's disappearance was noted in The Star August 15. The young man had been absent from his boarding place since the previous Monday, and the matter became public when his father, who is an employee in the Treasury Department, received a letter, in which his son intimated that he intended to commit suicide.

Mr. Wheeler, sr., attributed the strange actions of his son to a temporary mental aberration. The boy had been subject to these attacks. Once before he was picked up at Cambridgeport, Mass., while his mind was wandering and his parents notified by telegraph. In hopes of effecting a cure he was sent to the Bloomingdale Asylum, where he remained a short time, though at the time of leaving the house three weeks ago young Wheeler appeared to be all right.

He boarded with a friend, 1313 6th street northwest, his family residing at present in Riverdale.

A Popular Young Man

Mr. Wheeler was employed under the Smithsonian Institution as a stenographer and typewriter and was thoroughly liked by all his associates and superiors. He possessed a bright mind, but was rather quiet and reserved in disposition. His habits were regular, and he took great care of his attire. Mr. Wheeler is generally believed to have taken his own life while in a state of temporary insanity. It is said that he had been irrational several times in the past, and two years ago he was overcome by the heat and narrowly escaped death. It is thought that the recent hot spell brought about a recurrence of his mental trouble, and that while suffering from it and in an irresponsible condition he wandered away from his home and business and destroyed himself.