

John Church

(- 7 Jun 1878)

Church. The funeral of Mr. John Church will take place on Friday, June 14th, 1878 at 10 o'clock a.m. at Congressional Cemetery. Friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend.

The Evening Star, June 8, 1878

Frightful Death on the Rail

A Man Beheaded

Last night about 8:40 o'clock, the day express train south was approaching this city. While passing Wilson's, about eight miles from here, the engineer (Baker Johnson) noticed a man lying on the track with his head on one rail and his feet on another. The engineer blew his whistle and attempted to stop the train, but could not do so in time, as it was within a few yards of the man when he was first seen. The entire train passed over him. When it stopped and the railroad men went to look for the body the head could not be found. It had been severed from the body. The feet were also cut off. The headless trunk was placed in a car and brought here, arriving about nine o'clock. The head, which was thrown some distance from where the body was struck was subsequently found and brought down on the Richmond train, arriving at 2:27. There was not a feature about the face that could be recognizable, it being one undistinguishable mass of mangled flesh. Searching the pockets of the clothing no paper could be found to give a clue as to the identity of the victim. The clothing was dark, of fair quality, and the hat was a Derby with the name James Y. Davis' Sons, Washington, D.C., in it. It has been ascertained that yesterday, just before the 8:30 train was approaching the bridge over the Eastern branch a man 50 years of age and 5 feet 7 or 8 inches in height, evidently out of his mind, attempted to cross ahead of it, and some of the railroad employees had to hold him. The operator at Benning's yesterday afternoon saw the same man there, acting as if his mind was not right, and he went on northwards. The through freight train north passed that point about 7:25 o'clock. The man was not there then, but he had been in the neighborhood. The general description given of the man, except as to age, corresponds to that of an old man, 76 years old, named John Church, who resided at 407 L street southeast, and strayed away from his home about 7 o'clock yesterday morning, since which time nothing has been heard of him. Mr. Church's mind has been failing for some time, and day before yesterday he got quite violent in his actions. There seems to be little doubt that it is he who voluntarily sought and met such a frightful death.

Later—The body was identified this afternoon as that of Mr. Church.

The Evening Star, June 10, 1878

Locals

On Saturday afternoon Dr Patterson, the coroner, held an inquest on the body of John Church, whose head was cut off by an incoming train on the B & P railroad on Friday night while he was laying on the track. The jury found a verdict in accordance with the facts as stated in Saturday's Star, exonerating the railroad authorities from all blame.