



# The Circumstances and Cause of John Joseph Cahill's Death

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**October 2018**

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## The Circumstances and Cause of John Joseph Cahill's Death

Family stories can be passed down from generation to generation providing vague and often incorrect information about ancestors. Other times, these stories provide important clues that may guide the research of a family historian. Such was the case of John Joseph Cahill, who died much too soon, according to his ancestors, leaving a widow and two children. Family lore was that John J. Cahill worked for the railroad. One day, his daughter Anna walked to the station to deliver his dinner and learned that there had been an accident. She never saw her father again. So the story went...but no one seemed to know any other details. What date did John die? What caused his death? What role did his occupation at the railroad, if he truly worked there, play in his passing?

Ancestors had alerted the researcher that John's daughter Anna Cahill was born in 1894 in New York. Hypothetically, for Anna to deliver a meal to her father, she needed to be of a certain age to be able to walk to the train station on her own. That information led to census records with John Cahill, his wife Annie and their three children Annie (born December 1894), Jack and Francis living at 170 Fiftieth Street in Brooklyn, New York. John's listed occupation as a locomotive engineer further validated this as the correct family.<sup>1</sup>

Additional census research revealed that Anna was a widow, living with her two children Anna and Francis (number of children born vs. living suggested that son Jack had passed away), in the 1910 federal census;<sup>2</sup> she was listed as head of household with two children Anna and Francis in the 1905 New York state census.<sup>3</sup> Analysis based on the names, ages, and geographical location reveal that this was the correct family. It strongly suggested that John Cahill died between 1900 and 1905. These records were not completely without errors (for example, the state census listed the son Francis incorrectly as a daughter,<sup>4</sup> which was likely an enumeration error given Francis can be a female or male name when spoken). That said, the census records are original sources and provide important facts to support this research. It is unknown who the informant was for each census, though it was likely the wife/mother Anna. Anna would have been home during the day caring for her children and was best equipped to answer the detailed questions, particularly for the federal census related to immigration years and birthdates.

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<sup>1</sup> 1900 U.S. census, Kings County, New York, population schedule, Brooklyn, enumeration district (ED) 0103, sheet 14B, dwelling 157, family 286, John Cahill; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018), citing NARA microfilm publication roll 1047.

<sup>2</sup> 1910 U.S. census, Kings County, New York, population schedule, Brooklyn, enumeration district (ED) 519, sheet 15A, dwelling 120, family 307, Anna Cahill; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018), citing NARA microfilm publication roll T624\_969.

<sup>3</sup> 1905 New York state census, Kings County, population schedule, p. 38, house number 355, Anna F. Cahill household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018).

<sup>4</sup> 1905 New York state census, Kings Co., pop. sch., p. 38, house number 355, Anna F. Cahill.

John Cahill's death record revealed that he died on 19 November 1903 in Brooklyn, New York at the age of 38. According to the informant, Coroner Michael Flaherty, the cause of death was "shock, burns of body and head." John's occupation was listed as "motorman" and place of death was listed as "32nd Street and Fifth Avenue."<sup>5</sup> This record provides evidence of the cause of death, though it also raises more questions for a researcher. What circumstances led to shock and burns? Were they the actual cause for John's death? Was there more to the story than the death certificate suggested?

Anna Cahill filed a petition to the probate court given her late husband John Cahill did not have a will. This petition further validated that John died on 19 November 1903. It indicated that John died a "violent death" and acknowledged a "cause of action for death by negligence against the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Co."<sup>6</sup> The petition was a record produced by the court containing Anna's signature and listing her address as "258 Fiftieth Street, Brooklyn, NY" – the same street (though different house number) as the 1900 federal census. This document referenced the nature of John's death and provided more information on his employer, alluding that they might have been responsible for his death.

The train-related death was a big story in the newspapers of that time. With many New York newspapers in existence, the events surrounding John Cahill's death were discussed and theories were proposed as to why and how he died. Reputable newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and *The New York Sun*, provided independent points of view based on interviews with witnesses and family members, testimonies in a coroner's inquest and discussions with the railroad commission and employees.

The basic events were consistent across all newspaper coverage: John J. Cahill was the motorman of a Brooklyn Rapid Transit (B.R.T.) elevated train departing the 36th Street station in Brooklyn, New York (also known as the "Bay Ridge" train). At roughly 5:15pm on 19 November 1903, his train left the 36th Street station for the next stop at 25th Street and crashed into a stalled train. The stalled train had apparently lost power shortly after departing the 36th Street station due to a fuse blowing out. The motorman of the stalled train said he put a red lantern on the back of his train to notify any other trains of danger on the track. John J. Cahill's train was travelling approximately 25 miles per hour and did not reduce speed; "the cars came together with a crash that could be heard for blocks."<sup>7</sup> A fire then started under the cars, where the motors were located, enveloping the rear car of the stalled train and the first car of the colliding train. The crash killed two people, John J. Cahill, the motorman, and Patrick

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<sup>5</sup> Kings County, New York, death certificate no. 19589, John J. Cahill; New York State Department of Health.

<sup>6</sup> Surrogate Court, Brooklyn, "New York, Kings County, Probate Administration Records" database, *AncestryLibrary.com* (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com> : accessed 28 June 2018), John Joseph Cahill, 1903; images 205-208.

<sup>7</sup> "Rear-End L Collision, Two Burned to Death," *The Buffalo Times*, 20 November 1903, p. 9, cols. 4-5; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

Cahill, the conductor (no relation) and injured approximately 20 passengers.<sup>8</sup>

“John Cahill, the motorman, was found bolt upright, wedged against the motor, and the woodwork had to be chopped away to get him out. Almost every bone in his body had been broken by the impact, and he was burned to a cinder. Patrick Cahill, the conductor, was found lying on the floor of the car. He, too, was burned beyond recognition, and it was only from the position of the two bodies that their identity was determined.”<sup>9</sup> “When Mrs. John Cahill, the wife of the motorman, saw the body, she refused for ten or fifteen minutes to believe it was he. The flesh had been burned to the bone in many places.”<sup>10</sup>

The conductor of the disabled train said he went to the rear platform and saw the Bay Ridge train approaching under greater headway than he thought proper under the circumstances. He grabbed an extra red lantern and swung it for as long as he dared. When the Bay Ridge train was almost upon them, he dropped the lantern and ran forward. Despite some injuries, he was able to report: “Why Cahill was not able to see that a train was standing on the tracks ahead of him at that hour in the afternoon, even without the display of the proper danger signals, is beyond comprehension. Why he was not able to see the signals is still more incomprehensible.”<sup>11</sup>

A number of theories emerged as to why John J. Cahill did not stop the train:

- Motorman Cahill “fell dead at his post from heart disease or apoplexy a moment or two before the collision occurred.”<sup>12</sup>
- Motorman Cahill may have fallen asleep at his post.<sup>13</sup>
- Motorman Cahill may have been in conversation with the conductor Patrick Cahill and never saw the stalled train on the track.<sup>14</sup>
- Motorman Cahill “was busy in his cab and did not look down the track to see whether there was any obstacle ahead of him,” according to a witness who saw him less than five minutes before the accident.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Rear-End L Collision,” *The Buffalo Times*

<sup>9</sup> “Two Killed, 9 Hurt on Brooklyn Train,” *The New York Times*, 20 November 1903, p. 1, col. 6; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 6 September 2018).

<sup>10</sup> “Death in ‘L’ Crash,” *The New York Tribune*, 20 November 1903, p. 4, col. 4; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 17 September 2018).

<sup>11</sup> “2 Killed In Elevated Crash,” *The New York Sun*, 20 November 1903, p. 1, col. 1-2, image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 6 September 2018).

<sup>12</sup> “May Have Been Dead When Trains Crashed,” *The New York Times*, 21 November 1903, p. 2, col. 5; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

<sup>13</sup> “May Have Been Dead,” *The NY Times*

<sup>14</sup> “Investigating Wreck on Brooklyn Elevated,” *The New York Times*, 22 November 1903, p. 11, col. 4, image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

<sup>15</sup> “The State R.R. Board Investigates L Tragedy,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 21 November 1903, p. 2, col. 6; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

A hearing was held before the State Railroad Commission within days of the train wreck to solve the mystery surrounding the accident. B.R.T. executives and employees all maintained that their equipment was in perfect working order, proper protocols were followed by workers, and motorman Cahill was solely to blame for the accident. They insisted that if Cahill had taken his hand off the automatic controller, the power to the motor would have cut out and the train would have stopped.<sup>16</sup>

“Cahill’s good character, steady habits and general trustworthiness were sworn to by all the witnesses who were personally acquainted with him, and it also was shown that on the day previous to the accident he had worked ten hours and had fourteen hours’ rest before he reported to duty on Thursday afternoon,”<sup>17</sup> 19 November 1903. This work shift information was used by the B.R.T. superintendent to refute criticism by Cahill’s widow that her husband was overworked.<sup>18</sup> Commissioner Baker “tried to find out whether Cahill had any trouble on his mind which would tend to distract any attention from his employment,” but he was not able to find anything unusual. “Half a dozen employ[e]s said they saw Cahill shortly before the accident and that he appeared to be perfectly well.”<sup>19</sup> “There was no trouble or sickness in his family, so far as was known. Friends of the dead motorman said that he was a man of few words and that he would not have been apt to confide his troubles to his associates.”<sup>20</sup>

A.J. Wilson, a seven-year master mechanic at the B.R.T., boarded the Bay Ridge train at 52nd Street on 19 November 1903; this station was three stops before the 36th Street station.<sup>21</sup> “He said that when he boarded the train Cahill waved his hand and greeted him through the cab window...he had seen Cahill every day for months and they had been working together for ten years.”<sup>22</sup> This length of employment aligns with reporting that “Motorman Cahill was an old employe[e] of the [rail]road, and was considered one of the most experienced and careful motor car operators in the company’s service.”<sup>23</sup>

Based on this testimony above, it seems unlikely that John Cahill fell asleep at his post. He had a 14-hour break between shifts which provided ample rest time. His train stops were very frequent, and he interacted with a passenger shortly before the crash. He appeared to be of good health, both mentally and physically, according to family members and co-workers.

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<sup>16</sup> “Investigating Wreck,” *The NY Times*.

<sup>17</sup> “Investigating Wreck,” *The NY Times*.

<sup>18</sup> “L’ Men Not Overworked,” *The Evening World*, 21 November 1903, page 10, col. 6; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 17 September 2018).

<sup>19</sup> “Investigating Wreck,” *The NY Times*.

<sup>20</sup> “L Wreck Not Cleared Up By State Hearing,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 22 November 1903, page 49, col. 1; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

<sup>21</sup> “Fifth Avenue Line (Brooklyn elevated),” *Wikipedia.org* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth\\_Avenue\\_Line\\_\(Brooklyn\\_elevated\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Avenue_Line_(Brooklyn_elevated)) : accessed 16 July 2018).

<sup>22</sup> “The State R.R. Board Investigates,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

<sup>23</sup> “May Have Been Dead,” *The NY Times*.

The suggestion that John Cahill was in conversation with the conductor Patrick Cahill seems to be disputed by a conflicting story that hailed Patrick Cahill as a hero. Patrick “could have escaped, for he rushed through the cars, opening the rear gates and persuading passengers to alight and make their way along the narrow footbridge at the side of the tracks; this duty accomplished, he made his way back to aid the motorman, and his charred body was found beside the other.”<sup>24</sup> Given the reporter would have interviewed train passengers who attested to Patrick’s actions, this version of events seems more credible.

Coroner Flaherty investigated the scene roughly four hours after the accident. It was suggested that he “met considerable difficulty in getting at the facts in this case because of the close-mouthedness of the employe[e]s of the [rail]road. The Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company [had] a standing rule that its employe[e]s shall not give out any information concerning accidents.” When Flaherty was asked if there was a chance that motorman Cahill might have been stricken with heart disease, he responded that he “only heard a rumor that Cahill had been subject to fits of some kind.”<sup>25</sup>

“The Coroner also said that this accident made it clear to his mind that there was a need of an additional man at the motor of each of the electric elevated trains. The motorman of a train at times had the lives of several hundred passengers in his hands, and their lives depended upon the one man keeping his senses and his physical ability to perform his duty. Any one of the motormen might be suddenly stricken in the motor booth and the train go rushing on to disaster with the rest of the train crew and the passengers ignorant of the danger.”<sup>26</sup>

During the hearing, Commissioner Baker was concerned that there was no apparatus on the trains by which they could be stopped in case of danger, from any of the cars in the train. Most elevated cars in other cities had an auxiliary brake system, which could be operated from any car and used in emergency cases. He felt such equipment should have been provided in the borough of Brooklyn.<sup>27</sup>

By 4 December 1903, the following verdict was returned by the coroner’s jury at the inquest regarding the train accident: “We find that the death of John J. Cahill was caused by the burning of a car on the elevated structure of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, at Fifth avenue and Thirtieth street, due to a collision of two trains of the above company. In our opinion the collision was caused by the carelessness of the management of the said company, and we recommend that two motormen be placed in each motor box to prevent a like accident

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<sup>24</sup> “He Done His Duty,” *The Buffalo Evening Times*, 20 November 1903, p. 4, col. 2; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

<sup>25</sup> “May Have Been Dead,” *The NY Times*.

<sup>26</sup> “May Have Been Dead,” *The NY Times*.

<sup>27</sup> “L Wreck Not Cleared Up By State Hearing,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*

as in our opinion the motorman in charge of this train was stricken when the collision occurred.”<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

No one can know for sure what happened in that motorman’s cab in the minutes leading up to the train crash. Based on John Cahill’s work experience, length of service and perceived competent mental and physical health, the jury was led to believe that something must have happened that prevented him from reacting to the stalled train on the track. The impact of the crash and subsequent electrical fire that engulfed his cab ultimately resulted in his death; his body was burned beyond recognition.

A variety of sources were leveraged to understand the circumstances and cause of death for John Joseph Cahill. Census records established a date range for his death, while the death certificate and probate court petition records confirmed actual death date. An exhaustive search of newspaper articles provided a wealth of information on John’s death, including a host of details, testimony and opinions of numerous stakeholders. They gave a rich perspective of why and how John’s life ended and who he was as a person, through the eyes of his associates and friends.

## **Impact on the Family**

For the Cahill family, this must have been a very difficult time. John Cahill’s wife Anna was a widow left to raise two young children (Anna, age 10 and Francis, age 4) by herself. Previously a housewife, she was now in a position where she needed to earn an income. Family stories suggest that Francis was put in an orphanage so that Anna could go back to work. He stayed at the Mount Loretto Orphanage in Staten Island. By the 1905 census, Anna moved from her previous residence at 258 Fiftieth Street to 355 53rd Street, where she was listed as running a boarding house. Both of her children Anna and Francis were living with her, plus she had five boarders. These boarders, all men in their twenties, may have been associates of John Cahill at the B.R.T. given their listed occupations: two dispatchers, a towerman, a motorman and a driver.<sup>29</sup>

By 1910, Anna was residing at 497 Kosciusko Street in Brooklyn, living with Anna and Francis, and working as a nurse in a private home.<sup>30</sup> By 1915, she was living at 131 Lewis Avenue in Brooklyn, still working as a nurse. Fourteen year old Francis lived with her, as well as an 18-

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<sup>28</sup> “Blame B.R.T. For Crash On Fifth Av. L Nov. 19,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 5 December 1903, p. 22, col. 5; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

<sup>29</sup> 1905 New York state census, Kings County, population schedule, p. 38, house number 355, Anna F. Cahill household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018).

<sup>30</sup> 1910 U.S. census, Kings County, New York, population schedule, Brooklyn, enumeration district (ED) 519, sheet 15A, dwelling 120, family 307, Anna Cahill; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018), citing NARA microfilm publication roll T624\_969.

year old female boarder who was also a nurse.<sup>31</sup> In 1920, Anna was living at 395 Kosciusko Street in Brooklyn with her son Francis, her daughter Anna and Anna's husband Arnold Voltmann (listed as head of household). Anna was still working as a nurse for a private family.<sup>32</sup> Anna continued to live with Anna and Arnold Voltmann in 1925, this time at 2464 Palmetto Street in Ridgewood, Queens. At age 64, Anna was no longer working.<sup>33</sup>

Anna Cahill experienced quite a bit of loss in her lifetime. Her first husband, Milo J. Hatch, died on 4 November 1892 at the age of 35 due to phthisis (pulmonary tuberculosis).<sup>34</sup> A few years later, she married John Cahill on 1 January 1894<sup>35</sup> and they had four children together. Sadly, two of their sons passed away at a young age. Then Anna lost her second husband John Cahill on 19 November 1903 when he was only 38 years old. Anna must have been a very strong woman to survive so much loss and grief in her life. Anna had to adapt to a lot of change, including constant apartment moves as evidenced by the different addresses noted in each census. It must have taken so much fortitude for her to work and support her family during such a difficult time.

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<sup>31</sup> 1915 New York state census, Kings County, population schedule, p. 34-35, house number 131, Anna F. Cahill household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018).

<sup>32</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Kings County, New York, population schedule, Brooklyn, enumeration district (ED) 355 sheet 14A, dwelling 70, family 268, Anna Cahill; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018), citing NARA microfilm publication roll T625\_1153.

<sup>33</sup> 1925 New York state census, Kings County, population schedule, p. 11, house number 2464, Arnold Voltmann household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 17 July 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Albany Rural Cemetery (Menands, New York), "Burial Cards, 1791-2011," Milo J. Hatch entry; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 24 September 2018)

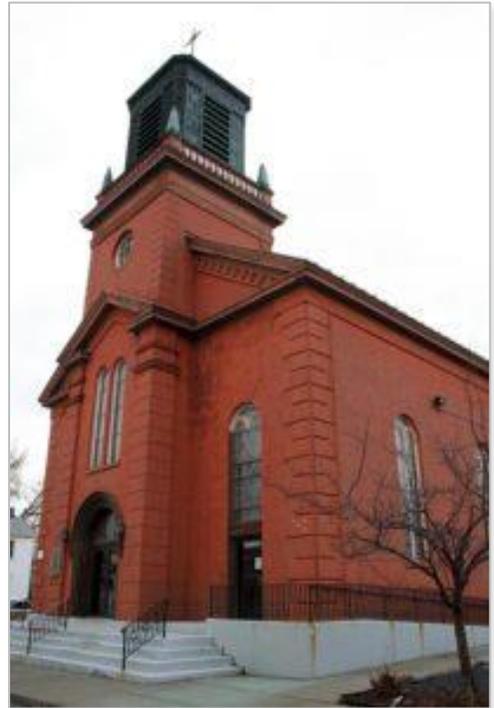
<sup>35</sup> Cahill-Daly Hatch marriage certification (1894 marriage). Issued 4 October 1930. St. Brigid's Rectory (Watervliet, New York). Privately held by Kerri Tannenbaum.

**APPENDIX A:  
Cahill Family Lineage**

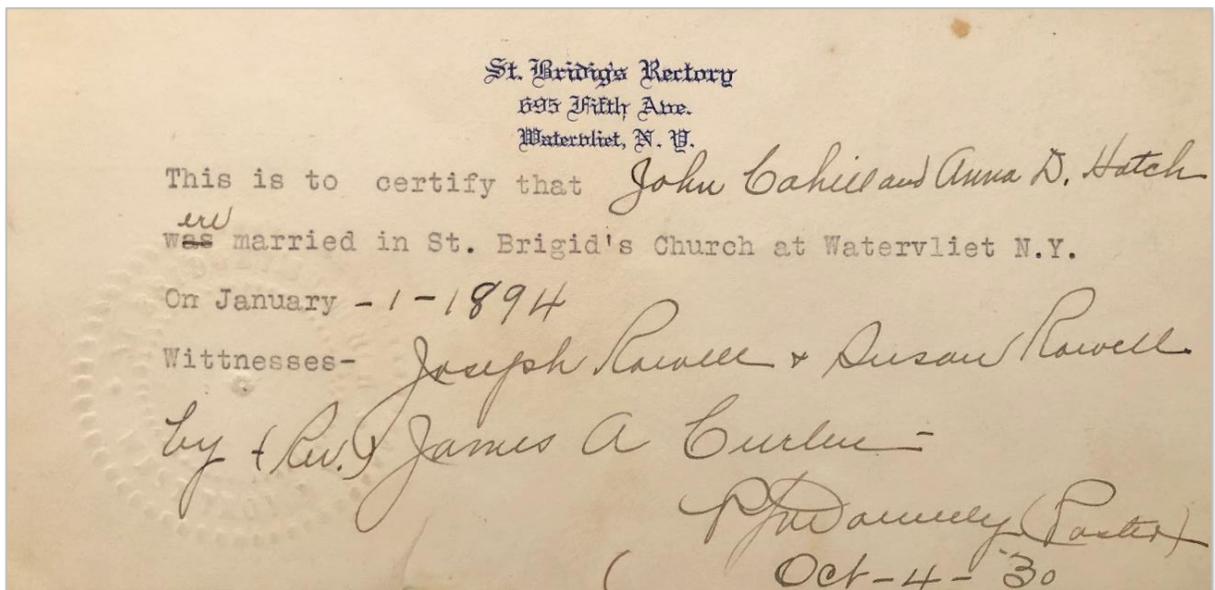
Anna F. Cahill (née Daly)



St. Brigid's Church, Watervliet, NY<sup>36</sup>



Marriage Certification for John and Anna Cahill<sup>37</sup>



<sup>36</sup> "St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church, Watervliet," *Troy Irish Genealogy Society* (<http://troyirish.org/troy-area-history/church-memorials-and-family-names-old/troy-area/st-brigids-roman-catholic-church-watervliet> : accessed 25 September 2018)

<sup>37</sup> Cahill-Daly Hatch marriage certification (1894 marriage). Issued 4 October 1930. St. Brigid's Rectory (Watervliet, New York). Privately held by Kerri Tannenbaum.

## Cahill Family Lineage

**[NOTE: PERSONAL INFORMATION REMOVED FOR THIS EXAMPLE]**

### John Joseph Cahill

Born 29 May 1865 | Ireland

Died 19 November 1903 | Brooklyn, NY

*Lived 38 years, 5 months and 24 days*

**married 1 January 1894**

### Anna F. Daly

Born 15 December 1861 | Ireland

Died 24 June 1934 | Queens, NY

*Lived 72 years, 6 months and 9 days*

### 4 children:

#### 1) Child 1

Born X Month Year | New York

Died X Month Year | New York

*Lived XX years, XX months and XX days*

**Marriage Date**

#### Child 1's Husband

Born X Month Year | New York

Died X Month Year | New York

*Lived XX years, X months and XX days*

### 2 grandchildren:

Grandchild 1 (Born X Month Year | New York; Died X Month Year | New York)

Grandchild 2 (Born X Month Year | New York)

#### 2) Child 2

Born X Month Year | New York

Died X Month Year | New York

*Lived X years and X months*

#### 3) Child 3

Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY

Died X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY

*Lived X months and X days*

#### 4) Child 4

Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY

Died X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY

*Lived XX years, X months and X days*

**Marriage Date**

#### Child 4's wife

Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY

Died X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY

*Lived XX years and XX days*

### 7 grandchildren:

Grandchild 1 (Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY; Died X Month Year | XX, NY)

Grandchild 2 (Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY)

Grandchild 3 (Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY; Died X Month Year | XX, NJ)

Grandchild 4 (Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY; Died X Month Year | XX, NY)

Grandchild 5 (Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY)

Grandchild 6 (Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY)

Grandchild 7 (Born X Month Year | Brooklyn, NY)

**APPENDIX B:  
Support Documents**

New York State Death Certificate for John J. Cahill<sup>38</sup>

		STATE OF NEW YORK. <b>CERTIFICATE AND RECORD OF DEATH</b>		No. of Certificate, <b>19589</b>
<i>John J. Cahill</i>				
Sex <b>Male</b>	Color <b>White</b>	Place of Death <b>32<sup>nd</sup> St + 5<sup>th</sup> Av</b>		
Age <b>38</b> Yrs.	Mos.	Days	Character of premises, whether tenement, private, etc. If hotel, hospital or other institution, state full title <b>R. R.</b>	
Single, married, widowed or divorced <b>Married</b>	Occupation <b>Motorman</b>		Father's Name <b>Thomas Cahill</b>	
Birthplace <b>Ireland</b>	Father's Birthplace <b>Ireland</b>			
How long in New York, if foreign born <b>20 yrs</b>	Mother's Maiden Name <b>unknown</b>			
Long resident of New York City "	Mother's Birthplace <b>Ireland</b>			
This is to certify that I, <i>Micrael J. Flaherty</i> Coroner in and for Borough of <i>Brooklyn</i> City of New York, have this <b>29</b> day of <b>Nov</b> 190 <b>3</b> , taken charge of the body of <i>John J. Cahill</i> and at <b>4014</b> <b>38<sup>th</sup> St</b> in the <b>Ward of said</b> borough, and that an inquest thereon is pending. <div style="text-align: right;"> <i>Micrael J. Flaherty</i> Coroner.                 </div>				
I hereby certify that I have viewed said body, and from <i>Evidence</i> evidence, that he died on the <b>19</b> day of <b>Nov</b> 190 <b>3</b> M., and that the cause of death was <b>Shock. Burns of body</b> <b>of head.</b>				
Special INFORMATION required in deaths in hospitals and institutions deaths of non-residents and recent residents. Usual Residence, <b>258 - 50<sup>th</sup> St</b> Long Resident at Place of Death,				
<i>Emil J. Harring</i> M. D. Coroner's Physician.				

<sup>38</sup> Kings County, New York, death certificate no. 19589, John J. Cahill; New York State Department of Health.

Kings County Surrogate's Court Records<sup>39</sup>

Form No. 86. 3114-108 (8)-5M

KINGS COUNTY SURROGATE'S COURT.

*Limited*  
In the Matter of the Application for Letters of Administration of  
the Goods, Chattels and Credits which were of

*John Joseph Cahill*

DECEASED.

TO THE SURROGATE'S COURT OF THE COUNTY OF KINGS :

THE PETITION OF *Anna Cahill*

respectfully shows :

That your Petitioner is a resident of No. *258-50th St.*  
in the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York, and is *the widow* of the said  
*John Joseph Cahill* deceased, and is of full age.

That the deceased departed this life, at the County of Kings, on the *19th*  
day of *November* 1903, and was at, or immediately previous to his death  
a resident of the County of Kings.

That your Petitioner has made diligent search and inquiry for a will of said deceased and  
has not found any, or obtained any information that he left any; and therefore alleges upon  
information and belief that said deceased died without leaving any Last Will and Testament.

That said deceased died a ~~natural~~ <sup>violent</sup> death, and that your Petitioner saw the remains of  
said deceased after his death.

That said deceased at the time of his death was possessed and the owner of certain  
personal property the value of which does not exceed the sum of  
*no* Dollars.

That said deceased at the time of his death was seized of real estate, the  
value of which is about *no* Dollars.

That said deceased did ~~not~~ <sup>except a cause of action for death by negligence against the Brooklyn Bridge Authority</sup>, during his life-time, make any transfer of  
property, by deed, grant, bargain, sale or gift in contemplation of his death, or intended to  
take effect in possession or enjoyment at or after his death.

That the names of the husband or widow, and the next of kin of the deceased, adopted  
child or children, as far as they are known to your Petitioner or can be ascertained by her  
with due diligence, are as follows :

*Anna Cahill widow 42 258 Fifth St. Brooklyn*  
*Anna Cahill daughter 9 258-50th St. "*  
*Francis Henry Cahill son 4 " " " "*

<sup>39</sup> Surrogate Court, Brooklyn, "New York, Kings County, Probate Administration Records" database, AncestryLibrary.com (<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com> : accessed 28 June 2018), John Joseph Cahill, 1903; images 205-208.

Your Petitioner therefore prays for a decree of the Surrogate's Court of the County of Kings, awarding Letters of Administration of the goods, chattels and credits which were of said deceased to *her* or such other person or persons, having a prior right, as may be entitled thereto, and that all persons having a right prior or equal to that of your Petitioner to such Letters of Administration, and who have not renounced, may be cited to show cause why such a decree should not be made.

Dated the *21st* day of *November* 190*3*,

*Anna Cahill*

STATE OF NEW YORK, }  
COUNTY OF KINGS, } ss.

*Anna Cahill*,

the above named

Petitioner being duly sworn doth depose and say that *she* he has read the foregoing petition subscribed by *her* and that the same is true of *her* own knowledge, except as to the matters therein stated to be alleged on information and belief, and as to those matters *she* believes it to be true.

Subscribed and sworn this *21st* day  
of *November* 190*3* }

*Anna Cahill*

*John Lawrence*

Notary Public, Kings County,  
NOTARY PUBLIC, (3) KINGS COUNTY.  
CERTIFICATE FILED IN N. Y. COUNTY.

STATE OF NEW YORK, }  
COUNTY OF KINGS, } ss.:

I *Anna Cahill*

do solemnly swear

and declare that I will, well, faithfully and honestly discharge the duties of Administrator of the goods, chattels and credits which were of *John Joseph Cahill* deceased, according to law.

Subscribed and sworn this *21st* day  
of *November* 190*3* }

*Anna Cahill*

*John Lawrence*

Notary Public, Kings County,  
NOTARY PUBLIC, (3) KINGS COUNTY.  
CERTIFICATE FILED IN N. Y. COUNTY.

At a Surrogate's Court held in and for the County of Kings  
at the Surrogate's Court Room, in the Hall of Records, in  
the County of Kings, on the 25<sup>th</sup>  
day of Nov. in the year one thousand  
nine hundred and eleven.

Present, Hon. JAMES C. CHURCH, Surrogate.

In the Matter of the Application for <sup>Limited</sup> Letters of Administration of  
the Goods, Chattels and Credits which were of

John J. Cahill

deceased.

On Reading and filing the verified petition of

Anna Cahill

praying for a decree awarding <sup>Limited</sup> Letters of Administration of the goods, chattels and credits, which  
were of said deceased to her or to such other person or persons having a prior right, as may  
be entitled thereto.

~~And on reading and filing the bond executed by said Administrat with competent sureties  
conditioned faithfully to execute the trusts reposed in h as such Administrat and to obey  
all orders of the Surrogate of the County of Kings, touching the administration committed to  
h and this Court being satisfied that said~~

Anna Cahill is

<sup>Limited</sup> in all respects competent to act as such Administrat<sup>rix</sup>, does hereby order and decree that  
Letters of Administration of the goods, chattels and credits which were of said deceased, be  
awarded to the said Petitioner.

And you are hereby restrained from compromising any right of action granted to you as  
Administrat<sup>rix</sup> by special provision of law, and from the enforcement of any judgment recovered  
therein, until the further order of the Surrogate on additional further satisfactory security.

James C. Church

Surrogate.

## TWO KILLED, 9 HURT ON BROOKLYN TRAIN

**Telescoped Cars Catch Fire After  
a Collision.**

**MAD RUSH OF PASSENGERS**

**Flee in Terror from Flames Caused by  
Dazzling Electric Flashes.**

**Marvelously Escape Deadly Peril of  
Third Rail in Flight Along the  
Tracks—Crowds in the  
Streets in Danger.**

In one of the most remarkable accidents occurring in recent years on the elevated railroads of Brooklyn, two men were killed last night, nine other persons injured, and four cars practically destroyed by fire on the Fifth Avenue line at Thirtieth Street. One train was run into in the rear by another train and the cars telescoped. Instantly there followed a series of dazzling electric flashes and the cars of the trains were enveloped in flames.

The passengers, thrown together in heaps, scrambled to their feet again—those who could—and rushed to the doors and windows in wild panic, fleeing along the track to the nearest station, braving in their anxiety to escape from the burning train the dangers from the deadly "third rail."

When the firemen had arrived and put out the fire, the motorman of the rear train, John Cahill of 238 Fiftieth Street, Brooklyn, and Patrick Cahill, the conductor, who lived at 498 Prospect Avenue, were found dead on board, the former crushed at his post and the latter burned to death.

The accident was caused by the collision of a train bound to the bridge from Sixty-fifth Street with a train that had just started from the station at Thirty-sixth Street for the same destination. The Sixty-fifth Street train had left the station at five minutes later. Just as the Thirty-sixth Street train reached Twenty-ninth Street a fuse blew out and the train came to a standstill.

Hart, the conductor on the first train, says that he ran to the rear platform and held a red lantern to warn the approaching train. It was believed, however, that Cahill, the motorman of the rear train, did not see the train ahead or the signal, for he did not diminish speed, and the cars came together with a crash that could be heard for blocks. Hart was thrown to the track and, although injured, groped his way back with the lantern in his hand to warn other trains. He was found later by the fireman and Ambulance Surgeon Heisman of the Norwegian Hospital lying on the track in a dazed condition, with his clothes almost torn from his back.

### TELESCOPED CARS ABLAZE.

Before the sound of the collision had died away flames were seen to issue from under the cars, where the motors are located. Within a moment the rear car of the first train and the first car of the second, ~~with which it was completely telescoped, were crushed into a mass.~~ other cars caught but a moment thereafter.

Accounts differ as to the number of passengers on the trains. It is known that the "short train," as the train from Thirty-sixth Street was designated, contained no one but the train crew. It consisted of four cars. The other train, consisting of five cars, is believed to have contained about ninety or a hundred passengers. Four of the nine cars were completely destroyed by the flames, and the two cars telescoped were mere cinders when the firemen succeeded in extinguishing the blaze.

It was some time before the firemen arrived, and Battalion Chief Dooley, who had charge at the fire, complained indignantly of the delay in sending in the alarm. As soon as the first engine company arrived and could get to work, however, the men made short work of the flames. They were unable to get at the cars until the arrival of Ladder Truck No. 64. This company did yeoman service, climbing into the burning cars as soon as they could get their ladders up. They were accompanied the cars with them and assisted in getting out the dead and injured.

John Cahill, the motorman, was found bolt upright, wedged against the motor, and the woodwork had to be chopped away to get him out. Almost every bone in his body had been broken by the impact, and he was burned to a cinder. Patrick Cahill, the conductor, was found lying on the floor of the car. He, too, was burned beyond recognition, and it was only from the position of the two bodies that their identity was determined. The bodies and the injured men were removed to the forward car of the first train, and this car was afterward attached to a locomotive and taken to the Twenty-fifth Street station, where the dead and injured were taken to the street and removed.

#### THE INJURED.

Those injured were:

COOK, WILLIAM, a car-heater tender of 323 Central Avenue; suffered bruises and shock; taken home.

CURTIS, JOHN, a passenger, of Navesink Highlands, N. J.; suffering from shock; taken home by friends.

DAYTON, WARREN, 25 years old, of 242 Fifty-first street and mother a fracture of the left hip; taken to Senez Hospital.

DOUGLASS, RALPH, of 274 Fourteenth Street, passenger; bruises and cuts about face and body; taken home.

FRIEDMAN, MORRIS, twenty-eight years old, 24 Henry Street, Manhattan; cut with broken glass and bruises; treated at Norwegian Hospital and left for home.

HART, CHARLES, 54 years old, conductor; burned about body and face and suffering from shock; taken to Norwegian Hospital.

SCHLANG, PHILIP, a heater tender, living at 311 Graham Avenue; bruises and shock; treated at Norwegian Hospital and left for home.

STONE, MORRIS, a real estate broker, 40 West One Hundred and Thirtieth Street, Manhattan; shock and bruises; left for home.

VELOSKY, Nathan, twenty-two years old, 63 East Fourth Street, Manhattan, cut and bruised; treated at Norwegian Hospital and left for home.

The two dead men were placed in a patrol wagon and taken to the Forty-third Street Police Station. Later in the evening John Cahill's wife called at the police station, but failed to identify the body of her husband.

The passengers on the train from Bay

<sup>40</sup> "Two Killed, 9 Hurt on Brooklyn Train," *The New York Times*, 20 November 1903, p. 1, col. 6; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 6 September 2018).

## 2 KILLED IN ELEVATED CRASH.

SEVEN HURT AND MANY IN DANGER FROM THIRD RAIL FLAMES.

**Motorman Drove Train Into Stalled Cars Visible Five Blocks Away—Conductor Gave Life in Brave Effort to Save Others—Passengers Walk to Station With Fire Flashing About Them.**

Two persons were killed and nine were injured in a rear-end collision on the Fifth avenue elevated railroad, between Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth streets, Brooklyn, shortly after 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon. The dead were:

CARILL, JOHN, motorman, 258 Fifth street, Brooklyn.

CARILL, PATRICK (no relation to John) conductor, 406 Prospect avenue, Brooklyn.

The injured are:

ANDER, of 822 Central avenue, Brooklyn; contusions of right arm and side and fractured right leg; taken to the Norwegian Hospital.

CURTIS, JOHN, lawyer, of Navesink Highlands, N. J., suffered severe shock; remained in drug store for two hours and was then taken home.

DATTON, WARREN, of 242 Fifty fifth street, Brooklyn; guard on Bay Ridge train; fractured thigh and internal injuries resulting from fall to the street from railroad structure; taken to the Norwegian Hospital; will probably die.

DODGLASS, RALPH, 24 years old, of 274 Fourteenth street, Brooklyn; contusions of right side and cut over eye; went home.

FRIEDMAN, MORRIS, 28 years old, of 324 Henry street, Manhattan; contusions of right leg and right arm and cut over right eye; taken to the Norwegian Hospital and went home later.

HART, CHARLES, contractor and builder, of 457 Fifty-seventh street, Brooklyn; contusions of knee and injuries to back; taken to the Norwegian Hospital.

SCHLANG, PHILIP, railroad heater tender, of 511 Graham Avenue, Brooklyn; injuries to right side and back; taken to the Norwegian Hospital.

STONE, MORRIS, real estate dealer of 10 West 113th street, Manhattan; injuries to back; treated by Ambulance Surgeon Hulseman and went home.

WOHLANSKY, NATHAN, 22 years old, of 63 East Fourth street, Manhattan; broken wrist and contusions of right leg; treated by Ambulance Surgeon Hulseman and went home.

The collision was very much like that which cost so many lives in the Park avenue tunnel in the winter of 1901. For the tunnel accident there was an explanation. It may have been an unsatisfactory explanation, but it was explained.

Why lives should have been lost and many persons injured in this rear-end collision on an elevated railroad, when the afterglow of sunset made it still fairly light will be, in all probability, never explained. The man by whom explanation could be made was John Cahill, motorman of the rear train. He was shocked to death in his motor box. The only other person who might have given a reason for the tragedy was Patrick Cahill, the conductor of the colliding train. His burned and blackened body was found on the floor of and rear platforms.

Both trains were on their way to the Bridge. At 5:11 o'clock yesterday afternoon a four car train, known on the road as a "short train," started from the station at Thirty-sixth street and Fifth avenue, for the Bridge. Just after it passed Thirtieth street, the fuse in the motor box blew out and the train, with every light extinguished, came to a stop. That particular train runs through from Thirty-sixth street to the Bridge without passengers every afternoon.

Six minutes before the "short train" left Thirty-sixth street, a Bay Ridge train pulled out of the Sixty-fifth street station on its way to the Bridge. It then consisted of three cars, in which, when the train reached Thirty-sixth street, were about seventy-five men and women.

At the Thirty-sixth street station three more cars were hooked to the forward end of the train, and John Cahill walked down the platform to take his place in the motor box of the first car. Patrick Cahill, the conductor, rang two bells and the Bay Ridge train started. Almost a dozen more passengers were picked up at Thirty-sixth street, but they found seats in the then rear cars.

Only because there were no passengers in the forward cars was the loss of life not much greater than it was.

Five blocks down the track from the Thirty-sixth street station the "short train" stood, stalled. It was seen by persons who stood on the station platform who were curious to know what was the matter with it. Why John Cahill didn't see it is a dead man's secret.

Gathering headway as it proceeded, the Bay Ridge train flew down the tracks, until suddenly there came a crash, a report as of an explosion, a shooting of electric flashes up and down the rails, a cracking of splattered wood, groans of the injured, the shrieks of those who knew not what had happened.

Fifteen minutes later cars of both trains were on fire, and onlookers in the street believed that the wreck was to be followed by a holocaust. Battalion Chief Dooley of the Brooklyn Fire Department says that the railroad people tried first to extinguish the flames before turning in an alarm. The chief telegraph operator at the Thirty-sixth street station denies this. He says that less than three minutes after the collision occurred an alarm was turned in from the box in the railroad station.

However that may be, it seemed to those who were watching from the street as the flames spread through the wreck that the Fire Department was a long time in reaching the scene. When it did get there, it made short work of putting out the fire.

In less than half an hour the flames were extinguished. Meantime the police sent in a hurry calls for ambulances to the Norwegian and the Soney hospitals. The Norwegian Hospital is in the immediate vicinity and its ambulances got there first.

But the hospital surgeons, looking up at the elevated structure and seeing the long, yellow electric streaks shooting along the rails in either direction, realized that it meant practically certain death to make a haphazard mount to the elevated structure.

There were men and women in the rear train, however, who believed that no worse death awaited them on the outside than that which threatened within, so they piled out of the three rear cars to the foot platform which connects the stations.

Before they got out they noted an act of heroism on the part of Patrick Cahill, the conductor of the train. Immediately after the collision Cahill, remembering the lives for which he was in part responsible, rushed from his post on the rear platform of the front car and through the others, opening the rear gates as he ran.

"It's against the rules of the company to open gates between stations," Cahill was heard to say as he passed through one of the cars, "but rules don't go in this case. Get out on the foot platform and get back to Thirty-sixth street as best you can."

When the fire had been extinguished and a search of the train was made, Cahill's name was found in the motor box.

John Cahill, the motorman, was never able even to open the windows of his box. He was shocked to death from the current

<sup>41</sup> "2 Killed In Elevated Crash," *The New York Sun*, 20 November 1903, p. 1, col. 1-2, image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 6 September 2018).

in the motor and then burned beyond even the recognition of his wife.

Patrick Cahill was not the only man in the employ of the company who did splendid work after the collision occurred. Andrew Sheehan, an inspector on the West End branch, putting on rubber boots, rubber gloves and a rubber coat, dashed down the track from the Thirty-sixth street station and went through both trains, while they were still afire, to direct the uninjured how to get out and to help those who needed assistance.

Sheehan must have reached the wreck shortly after Patrick Cahill had opened the gates and many of the passengers said that it was largely due to his shouts of direction and encouragement that the uninjured were able to get out of the wreck and back to the Thirty-sixth street station.

It was perilous walking for the passengers from the train to the station, however, because for some time after the exodus began the current could not be or was not shut off from the third rail, and there was enough electricity under foot and on all sides to make unsteady even the steadiest nerves. For a time the handrail along the path was charged with electricity, and

Many of the women kept their heads just long enough to reach the haven of the Thirty-sixth street station. Then they keeled over unconscious and the station employees were as busy as the surgeons were later in restoring the fainting women to their senses.

Owing to the efficient work of the Fire Department and the cool headedness of somebody connected with the railroad company, the surgeons were able to attend to all the injured in about half an hour after the collision.

By that time the fire had been put out and a locomotive had been run up the track from behind the Twenty-fifth street station and coupled to the front car of the forward train. Into this car the injured were put and taken to the Twenty-fifth street station, where they were attended by the hospital surgeons.

There was one among the injured, however, who was found on the lawn of Greenwood Cemetery, which extends for several blocks along the line of the road at that point. He was Warren Dayton, a guard on the rear train.

Dayton was evidently taking no chances on the elevated structure after the collision. Measuring carefully the distance from the elevated platform to the cemetery lawn, he gathered himself and jumped.

Williams Hughens, a young man living at 214A Twenty-ninth street, who was returning from work, says that Dayton landed, apparently, in a heap on the top of the cemetery fence. Then he toppled over among the tombstones.

He was found there later suffering from internal injuries and a broken wrist and all but unconscious. He was taken to the Seney Hospital, where it was said at midnight last night that his chances for recovery were slight.

Three of the nine injured were from Manhattan, all on their way home. Morris Stone, a real estate dealer of 10 West 115th

street, suffered from an injured back, but after being treated at the hospital went home. Morris Friedman of 324 Henry street, who had cuts on the right leg and arm and over the right eye, and Nathan Woelansky of 63 East Fourth street, who got a broken wrist and cuts on the legs and

As soon as possible after the collision General Manager Calderwood of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit company and his assistant, Mr. Folds, made an investigation into its cause. It was impossible to get very satisfactory reports last night, but, after getting the testimony of everybody who was in any position to give details, Mr. Folds made the following statement shortly after 11 o'clock:

"We are in no position at present to place the blame for this sad and most unfortunate happening on the shoulders of anybody. We are forced to a tentative conclusion, however, that the responsibility for the accident rested with John Cahill, the motorman of the Bay Ridge train. We have the statements of Conductor Stevens and Motorman Danielson of the train that was run into to the following effect:

"Between Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth streets something happened to the motor of the train that pulled out of Thirty-sixth street empty. I suppose that the fuse blew out. As soon as Stevens found that his train was without power he went to the rear platform to see if the red signal lamps were burning there as they should have been. He found that they were. While he was standing on the rear platform he saw the Bay Ridge train approaching under greater headway than he thought proper under the circumstances.

"Grabbing an extra red lantern, Stevens stood on the rear platform and swung it as long as he dared. When the Bay Ridge train was almost upon the other Stevens dropped his lantern and ran forward. He was slightly injured by the collision, but was still able to make a report.

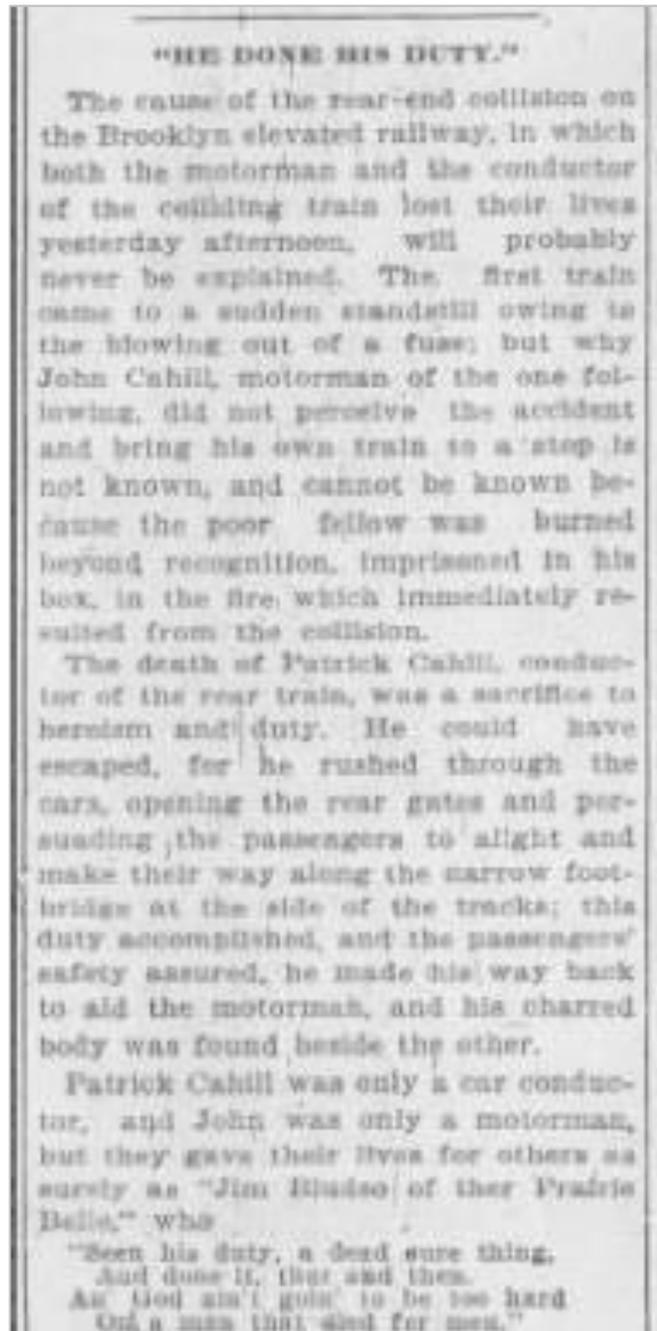
Why Cahill was not able to see that a train was standing on the tracks ahead of him at that hour in the afternoon, even without the display of the proper danger signals, is beyond comprehension. Why he was not able to see the signals is still more incomprehensible.

"While I don't wish to be quoted as giving an official opinion as to the cause of the wreck taking fire, it would seem to be plain that after the collision occurred several of the cars were derailed, thus producing short circuits on the third rail. The electricity thus set free fired the wreck. At least, that is one explanation for the front car of the rear train were completely telescoped. The cars immediately in front and to the rear of these two cars were badly splintered. The second car of the front train and the three forward cars of the rear train were badly burned, as were the ties and other woodwork of the elevated structure. The estimated property loss to the railroad company is \$25,000.

All trains on the Fifth avenue line were tied up from the time that the collision occurred till 11 o'clock last night. After that the southbound track was used for trains on the Bay Ridge, West End and Culver branches.

Homegoers from the theatre and other late travellers were transferred in this way after 11 o'clock and all through the night. It will probably be well on toward evening to-day before the north track is repaired enough for regular traffic.

<sup>42</sup> "2 Killed In Elevated Crash," *The New York Sun*, 20 November 1903, p. 1, col. 1-2, image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 6 September 2018).



<sup>43</sup> "He Done His Duty," *The Buffalo Times*, evening edition, 20 November 1903, p. 4, col. 2; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

## REAR-END "L" COLLISION, TWO BURNED TO DEATH

NEW YORK, Nov.—As the result of a rear end collision late Thursday afternoon a Bay Ridge train containing about 100 passengers and a train of five empty cars, both of which were bound for Brooklyn Bridge on the Fifth Avenue branch of the Brooklyn elevated railroad, John A. Cahill, motorman of the Bay Ridge train and Patrick Cahill conductor on the Bay Ridge train were burned to death. Warren Dayton, of Brooklyn, guard on the empty train, was fatally injured and a number of others were slightly injured.

### Two Cars Caught Fire.

The accident was due to the Bay Ridge train running into the empty cars. Immediately after the crash two cars of each train caught fire from the electric connections on the "L" structure.

The passengers on the Bay Ridge

Seventy-five people out of every hundred need Scott's Emulsion just at this season; the other twenty-five would be benefited by it—there's scarcely anyone whose general condition would not be improved by Scott's Emulsion at this time of the year. It puts on solid, healthy flesh and builds up the whole body.

That is what Scott's Emulsion is guaranteed to do. As Scott's Emulsion has been the standard for thirty years this guarantee means something.

# THE SU

68-72 SENECA STREET

# THE

train were panic stricken.

The bodies of the motorman and conductor of the Bay Beach train were found burned to a crisp.

### Came to a Standstill.

The train of empties had left the station at 36th Street some minutes in advance when the Bay Ridge train came to a standstill. Hart, the conductor on the light train, ran to a rear platform and held a red light to warn the approaching train, but Cahill, the motorman of the train following did not diminish his speed and the cars came together with a crash that could be heard for blocks.

Before the sound of the collision had died away, flames started under the cars, where the motors are located. Within a moment the rear car of the first train and the first car of the second train which were completely telescoped, were enveloped in flames and the other cars caught but a moment thereafter. A fire alarm was turned in and the firemen made short work of the flames.

### Scrambled Through Windows.

During the panic men and women scrambled through the windows to the paths running along both sides of the track. All escaped shock, although the electric current had been transmitted to the iron guard rail at the side.

<sup>44</sup> "Rear-End L Collision, Two Burned to Death," *The Buffalo Times*, evening edition, 20 November 1903, p. 9, cols. 4-5; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

# BURNED TO DEATH IN "L" CRASH

MOTORMAN AND CONDUCTOR ON B. R. T. TRAIN  
KILLED—EIGHT OTHERS INJURED.

Cars Catch Fire—Two Jump to Street—Fortunately, Trains Were  
Not Crowded.

Two persons were killed and eight injured, one probably fatally, in a rear end collision between two motor trains on the Brooklyn Union Elevated Railroad just north of the Thirty-sixth-st. station, at 5:15 p. m. yesterday. The collision was followed by a fire, which burned four of the cars, two being almost completely consumed. The two who lost their lives were the conductor and motorman of the rear train. They were burned to death, being unable, on account of their injuries, to make their escape. The front train had just pulled out of the yard and was empty, and the rear train, bound for the city from Bay Ridge, did not have many people in the front car. Had the trains been crowded there must have inevitably been a great loss of life. As it was, it was almost a miracle that a large number of the passengers in the rear train escaped serious injury. Two passengers, it is said, jumped from the elevated structure.

The dead are:

CAHILL, John, of No. 24 Pittsfield-st., Brooklyn; motorman of the Bay Ridge train.  
CAHILL, Patrick, of No. 450 Prospect-ave., Brooklyn; conductor of the Bay Ridge train.

The Cahills were not related to each other in any way.

#### THE INJURED.

COOK, William, twenty-three years old, of No. 322 Central-ave., Brooklyn; contusions and burns; taken home.  
CUTLER, John, lawyer, of Narvesink Highlands, N. J.; shock and bruises; went home.  
DAYTON, Warren, twenty-eight years old, elevated car, of No. 322 Pittsfield-st., Brooklyn; fracture of left hip and internal injuries; in Stoney Hospital; will probably die.  
FRIEDMAN, Morris, of No. 224 Henry-st., Manhattan; contusions and shock; taken home.  
HART, Charles, fifty-four years old, of No. 225 Fifty-seventh-st., Brooklyn; conductor of the "short train"; burns and internal injuries; Norwegian Hospital.  
SUEHLING, Philip, forty-eight years old, of No. 311 Graham-ave.; a center tender; bruises, shock and burns; Norwegian Hospital.  
STONE, Morris, a real estate broker, of No. 10 West One-hundred-and-thirtieth-st., Manhattan; shock and bruises; taken home from Norwegian Hospital.  
VELINSKY, Nathan W., twenty-two years old, of No. 92 East Fourth-st., Manhattan; cut by flying glass and bruises; treated at Norwegian Hospital and left there for home.

The accident happened between Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth sts., between the Union station at Thirty-sixth-st. and the Twenty-fifth-st. station. At 5:10 o'clock a train of four cars, known as a short train, left the union station for the bridge. It was on the rush hour schedule and had been made up at the station, so there were no passengers on it. At the point mentioned a fuse in the motor box blew out, stopping the train and leaving the rear car in darkness. Charles Hart, the conductor, says that he immediately ran to the rear of the train with a red lantern, intending to go back along the structure and stop on-coming trains. He had just got onto the track when the following train came thundering down. He made a brave effort to stop it, but failed,

and jumped to one side just in time to avoid being run down, but was caught in the wreckage and found lying beside the track, the red lantern still in his hand.

The second train was a motor train of five cars, bound to the bridge from Bay Ridge. It was due to leave the station one minute after the short train. Cahill, the motorman, it is understood, was a new man on the run, and did not know that he was following another train so closely. As he is dead and the conductor of the train is dead, it was impossible last night to get any explanation of the way the accident occurred from the viewpoint of the Bay Ridge train.

Passengers on the Bay Ridge train say that it was going at a high rate of speed. Suddenly there was a heavy jar, as if the airbrakes had been jammed on. The train rocked as if it would go off the structure, and then came the impact of collision. In every car the passengers were hurled to the floor. There was the sound of crashing wood and flying glass and the shrieks of women. The motor car of the rear train, being more substantial than the rear car of the front train, ploughed through the latter for almost its entire length. Had any persons been in the telescoped car many of them would undoubtedly have been killed. Most of the injured persons were in the front car of the rear train. For ten feet this car was crushed. Cahill, the motorman, was pinned in his box.

Eye witnesses in the street say that when the trains came into collision there was a loud explosion, and the flames immediately began to shoot up around the cars. Some say that the motor box exploded and others that the flames were communicated to the woodwork from the third rail, contact with which was made by ironwork from the broken cars. The dozen or so passengers in the front motor car who were able to do so picked themselves up and fled into the rear cars. When it was seen that four men were lying on the floor apparently unable to move, several of the passengers rushed back and got the injured persons.

They say that Patrick Cahill, the conductor, was just dragging himself to his feet. His back seemed to be injured, and willing hands offered to help him out. He threw them back, however, and said he must go and get the fire extinguisher in the front of the car. So he limped back into the flames. Later he was found burned to a crisp on the bottom of the car.

The passengers in the Bay Ridge train opened the gates of the rear cars and made their way to the elevated structure. The road ahead was blocked by the broken and splintered cars, wrapped in flames. One of the cars had been almost pushed over the edge of the structure, and to those below it looked as though it would

Continued on fourth page.

<sup>45</sup> "Burned to Death in 'L' Crash," *The New York Tribune*, 20 November 1903, p. 1, col. 4; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 17 September 2018).

(continued)

## DEATH IN "L" CRASH.

Continued from first page.

fall into the street any minute. So it was impossible to reach the Twenty-fifth-st. station, which was only a block away, and such of the passengers who did not linger at a safe distance to watch the extraordinary happenings were obliged to pick their way over the tracks to the Thirty-sixth-st. station. They were in danger not only from the highly charged third rail, but also from the other rails and iron hand railing at the side of the structure, which were charged with electricity from the mass of iron that formed a contact with the third rail.

Dayton, the guard, who is said to be dying in the Seney Hospital, either jumped or fell at the time of the collision, and landed in the street. A saloonkeeper who saw the collision declared that he saw another man jump off into Greenwood Cemetery, in front of which the accident Italian, picked himself off the grass and ran away as fast as his legs could carry him.

William Hewins, of No. 214 Fourteenth-st., who was standing in the street when the accident occurred, says that he started to run to the fire alarm box, when he met a policeman, who said that an alarm had already been turned in. This was not so, as the alarm did not go in until five minutes later. Battalion Chief Dooley said later that a big mistake had been made in delaying the alarm. The first firemen on the scene could do nothing because they could not reach the structure until a hook and ladder truck reached there. Before they got a stream at work four cars, two on each train, were in flames. They could see the body of Cahill, the motorman, standing upright in his box, wrapped in flames and smoke. They turned their attention to this car and took out Cahill's body and then later found the body of the conductor on the floor just back of the motorman's box. It was rumored that several others were in the car, but none were found.

Ambulances had been called from the Seney and Norwegian hospitals, and two surgeons were in each. They climbed to the structure on fire ladders and reached the injured persons, who had been laid out on the structure. Hospital ambulance, and Dr. Beach of the Seney Hospital ambulance. Stretchers were taken to the rear of the Bay Ridge train, where the injured persons had been taken. After the flames were put out these stretchers were carried through the remains of the cars and around them, a most dangerous trip, and to the Twenty-fifth-st. station, a block away. From this platform they were taken to the street and thence to the hospitals.

The news of the accident spread rapidly around Brooklyn, and soon there was a tremendous crowd in the street below the blazing cars. While the cars were burning blazing brands and red hot iron bars were continually falling to the street, endangering the people there. Reserves from five precincts were called out and drew a sharp line for a block each side of the accident.

The report spread that the rear end collision had been between two trains coming from the bridge and crowded with persons coming home from work. Because the power was cut off on the third rail of the elevated and the trolley wires of the Fifth-ave. line, which run under the elevated structure, were burned by the fire, all the homeward bound travel in that direction was cut off except on the Third-ave. line. People were actually sitting on the roofs of those cars in two instances. When fathers and brothers did not get home from work their families were sure that they had been killed in the accident hundreds and overran the Fourth-ave. station, making anxious inquiries about the dead and injured. Several policemen, with lists of the victims, were detailed to answer all these persons.

When Mrs. John Cahill, wife of the motorman, saw the body she refused for ten or fifteen minutes to believe that it was he. The flesh had been burned to the bone in many places. After the Coroner had viewed the bodies of the two Cahills they were removed to their homes late last night.

There is a conflict of opinion as to whether the "short train" had red tail lights burning. As that part of the car was consumed, it can never be told, but the train dispatcher at the Union station declares that it went out properly equipped. The blowing out of a fuse, the officials of the road declared, was something that could not be avoided, and that the collision would never have occurred if the motorman of the Bay Ridge train had used proper precautions.

Swarming over the high structure, a large force of men was at work all night chopping away the half burned cars and throwing the debris to the street below. This made it necessary for passengers on the Fifth-ave. surface cars to transfer around the scene of the wreck. Mr. Calderwood, the vice-president and general manager, and Dow H. Smith, general superintendent of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit, returned off, and, as the axes occasionally hit some metal work on the wrecked cars, a brilliant stream of sparks dropped to the street, scattering the small crowd of spectators that withstood the biting winds that were blowing over the vacant lots from Gowanus Bay. Mr. Smith said he thought the road would be cleared by 2 a. m., but at midnight little progress had been made in clearing the track.

He would not make any statement about the accident. The cold weather seriously hampered the men, who were working like Trojans to remove the wreckage and repair the damaged roadway.

About 11 o'clock a few trains were run from Twenty-fifth-st. down to the bridge. All the heavy traffic of the early evening on that part of the elevated system was diverted to the surface lines, which were badly taxed.

What purported to be an official statement came out at midnight. It alleged that the primary cause of the accident was the blowing out of a fuse on the first train, and that a guard on the rear of the train had signalled the Bay Ridge train that was following to stop, but the signal was disregarded by the motorman of the Bay Ridge train, who is dead.

There was a terrible crush at the bridge that lasted till 8 o'clock. Thousands of people took no chances in getting home on packed and slowly moving trolley cars, but started to walk. Not for a long time has there been such a parade of tired Brooklynites across the bridge and along the line of the Fifth-ave. elevated road.

<sup>46</sup> "Burned to Death in 'L' Crash," *The New York Tribune*, 20 November 1903, p. 4, col. 4; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 17 September 2018).

**MAY HAVE BEEN DEAD  
WHEN TRAINS CRASHED**

**Theory That Brooklyn Motorman  
Was Stricken at His Post.**

**Red Lights on Rear of Stalled Train  
Were Plainly Visible, Signalman  
Says—Probable Cause of  
the Fire.**

The theory that Motorman Cahill of the Bay Ridge train, which ran into another train on the Fifth Avenue Elevated Railroad in Brooklyn on Thursday night, fell dead at his post from heart disease or apoplexy a moment or two before the collision occurred was advanced yesterday in efforts to explain the cause of the accident. This peculiar idea was suggested in view of certain circumstances of the fatal wreck.

There is a signal tower at Thirty-sixth Street, a few blocks from where the accident happened, and the signalman who was on duty there at the time says that he distinctly saw the red lights on the rear of the stalled train. It is claimed that the mechanism of the Bay Ridge train was in proper working order, as it had been tested terminal on the fatal trip. Motorman Cahill was an old employe of the road, and was considered one of the most experienced and careful motor car operators in the company's service.

President Winter of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company said yesterday afternoon that he had not succeeded in ascertaining just what was responsible for the accident.

"And, what is more," he added, "it is likely that we never will learn. Whether Cahill had an apoplectic fit or one of those lapses which happen in railroading, or whether he fell asleep, we may never know. It seems to be clearly established that red lights were displayed at the rear of the stalled train. There is quite convincing testimony as to this. It seems, also, that the conductor of this train swung a red lantern in addition."

General Manager Calderwood said that his investigations showed that the danger signals had been properly displayed, and he could not understand how Motorman Cahill failed to see them.

It was learned that the motor car of the Bay Ridge train was an old one which had been used in locomotive trains. It was only recently "converted" into a motor car. This was admitted to be so by George R. Folds, Assistant General Manager of the road. He added, however, that an examination made by the company's mechanics had shown that the equipment of this car was in perfect working order at the time of the accident.

Coroner Flaherty visited the scene of the wreck yesterday and made a careful investigation. He said last night that he would try at the inquest to fix the responsibility for the accident. He will summon

a large number of witnesses to the inquest, which will probably be held next Friday night in the Borough Hall. The Coroner said that his investigations had not led him to any conclusion as to the responsibility for the collision. He did not expect that that point would be determined until the inquest. Although he would not say so himself, it is known that Coroner Flaherty at the facts in the case because of the close-mouthedness of the employes of the road. The Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company has a standing rule that its employes shall not give out any information concerning accidents or other matters affecting the company.

Coroner Flaherty said last night that the accident was not reported to him until nearly four hours after it had happened. By that time many of the people from whom he could have obtained information had left the scene and could not be found. Asked if he had learned anything to indicate that Motorman Cahill might have been stricken with heart disease, he said that he had heard only a rumor that Cahill had been subject to fits of some kind.

The Coroner said that this accident had made it clear to his mind that there was need of an additional man at the motor of each of the electric elevated trains. The motorman of a train at times had the lives of several hundred passengers in his hands, and their lives depended upon this one man keeping his senses and his physical ability to perform his duty. Any one of the motormen might be suddenly stricken in the motor booth and the train go rushing on to disaster with the rest of the train crew and the passengers ignorant of the danger.

Although three wrecking crews were at work all night trying to clear the line, it was not until 9 o'clock yesterday morning that the first train was sent through on the track where the wreck occurred. As a result the people of South Brooklyn and the suburbs, who had had the hardest kind of a time getting home the night before, were again greatly inconvenienced in getting to work and business in Manhattan. Up to 9 o'clock most of these people were obliged to travel to Manhattan on the Third Avenue, Fifth Avenue, and other trolley lines reaching their sections. These cars, bound for Manhattan, were almost as crowded for a time as they had been the night before coming from Manhattan. Hundreds of Brooklynites were late in getting to their offices and shops in consequence of the failure to clear the elevated line.

Three of the burned cars were such complete wrecks that they were chopped to pieces, which were dropped to the street and carted away. The fourth car was only partially burned. It was taken to the shops afternoon it was said that the fire which occurred immediately after the collision seemed to have been due to short circuiting resulting from the iron wreckage coming in contact with the third rail. The officials of the road say that they have not been able so far to find any device which will not interfere with the running of trains while protecting the rail, but that every effort would be made to find some means of preventing third-rail accidents in future.

Warren Dayton, the guard who fell from the structure when the accident occurred, was reported yesterday at the Sney Hospital to be still in a serious condition, and the doctors fear that he will not survive. Charles Hart and Philip Schlang, two of the victims of the collision, are still in the Norwegian Hospital. Hart is recovering, but Schlang is suffering from internal injuries and his condition is more serious.

Charged with criminal negligence, Martin Stevens, the motorman of the train which was run into by the Bay Ridge train, was arrested yesterday. When arraigned in the Butler Street Court Stevens was promptly discharged by Magistrate Tighe, there being nothing to show that he was in any way culpable.

<sup>47</sup> "May Have Been Dead When Trains Crashed," *The New York Times*, 21 November 1903, p. 2, col. 5; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

## THE STATE R. R. BOARD INVESTIGATES L TRAGEDY

Employees of B. R. T. Testify That  
Motor Cars Were in Good  
Condition.

HAD AUTOMATIC CONTROLLERS.

The Moment Motorman's Hand Left the  
Lever All Power Was Cut Off—Cahill  
Apparently V. D.

The State Railroad Commission is to-day taking evidence, in the offices of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit building, to fix the blame for the accident on the Fifth avenue elevated on Wednesday evening, in which two lives were lost and a score or more were injured. Railroad men who were in the wreck or in any way connected with the branch of the service of which the Fifth avenue line is a branch were examined this morning by Commissioner Frank M. Baker and C. R. Barnes, electrical expert of the commission.

W. O. Wood, superintendent of the elevated lines of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit, testified that Cahill, the motorman in charge of the train which ran into the train standing near the Thirty-sixth street station, had been at work only two hours after a rest of fourteen hours. A. J. Wilson, who was in the wreck, saw Cahill less than five minutes before the accident and testified that in his not look down the track to see whether there was any obstacle ahead of him after he left the Thirty-sixth street station.

It was proven this morning to the satisfaction of the commission that the motors on the two trains were automatic and that had Motorman Cahill not had his hand on the controller governing the motor the current would have been cut off and the colliding train would have stopped. If the motorman's hand had been removed from the controller it would have reverted to zero, cutting off the current.

W. O. Wood was first called to the stand. Mr. Wood explained that employes running trains are compelled to pass an exam-

ination to show qualifications. He explained the lights and signals on the two trains, stating that he was positive that every signal was in perfect order. There were orange and red lights on each car, and two oil lamps on the rear platform, and also white hand lanterns.

Train Master J. J. Dempsey and Train Dispatcher worked under Mr. Dempsey, were at Thirty-sixth street. They explained in detail the duties of each man connected with the Thirty-sixth street station and of the men on the trains.

R. C. Taylor was then called to the stand and said that he had been with the Brooklyn Rapid Transit since December 1. He said that he had charge of the electrical system and power houses of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit; that the first train had 160 horse power. The power was controlled by a motorman in the first car, he said, and explained technically how the power is regulated and how it would be cut off if the hand of the motorman was removed from the controller on the motor.

Five of the six cars of the second train had two motors of 150-horse power, and on this train the equipment was the same as on the first train. A system could be provided, he said, which would enable any trainman on a train to cut off the power without the knowledge of the motorman. All of the cars on the two trains were equipped with airbrakes, which were thoroughly inspected shortly before the accident. Renovated every three months, he said.

A. J. Wilson, seven years a master mechanic of the B. R. T., explained in detail how the cars in the wrecked trains were inspected at the yards. Mr. Wilson was in the wreck. He boarded the colliding or rear train at Fifty-second street. He said that when he boarded the train Cahill waved his hand and greeted him through the cab window. He took a seat in the fourth car in the train. He said that he had seen Cahill every day for months and they had been working together for ten years.

At the time of the accident Cahill's train was running twenty-five miles an hour. When the impact came the body of the car gave way and the platform held firm. There were seven or eight people in the fourth car, in which Wilson was riding, who were not able to get out, as the doorways were blocked by splintered wood. The two rear cars of the second train were run back about 300 feet by their own motor after the collision.

C. F. Strausburg, foreman at Thirty-sixth street, testified that inspection of the two motor cars of the trains in the wreck showed that they were in perfect condition on the morning of the 19th. Reports of inspectors were examined to show that the cars, including motors and breaks, were in perfect condition when they went into operation. He said that the brakes on the two rear cars of the colliding train were set but as the train line was broken after the crash it was not possible to determine whether they were put on before or after the crash. He said that he was convinced that the master controller operated by Cahill had not been shut off and that the current was on in full force at the time of the wreck.

At 12:45 an adjournment was taken to 1:30

<sup>48</sup> "The State R.R. Board Investigates L Tragedy," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 21 November 1903, p. 2, col. 6; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

## “‘L’ MEN NOT OVERWORKED.”

### **Calderwood So Declares at B. R. T. Wreck Investigation.**

State Railroad Commissioners Dunn, Baker and Dickey went to Brooklyn to-day to investigate the cause of the accident on the Brooklyn Rapid Transit elevated road last Thursday night.

The investigation was held in the office of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company. Testimony of trainmen and witnesses was taken.

In reply to the criticisms passed upon the methods of the company in operating its trains Supt. Calderwood, answering particularly the statement accredited to the widow of Motorman Cahill that her husband was over-

“The men are not overworked. Cahill was off for fourteen hours before taking his train and then had worked only two hours when the accident occurred.”

<sup>49</sup> “‘L’ Men Not Overworked,” *The Evening World*, 21 November 1903, page 10, col. 6; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 17 September 2018).

## L WRECK NOT CLEARED UP BY STATE BOARD HEARING.

Little Attention Paid to the Vital  
Question Why First Train  
Stopped.

CAHILL, WHO IS DEAD, BLAMED.

Efforts to Find Out Whether He Had  
Any Trouble on His Mind—Hearing  
May Be Resumed.

Little progress was made at the hearing before the State Railroad Commission toward solving the mystery surrounding the fatal accident on the Fifth avenue elevated Thursday evening, in which two lives were lost and a score of people were injured. Testimony was taken from a score of witnesses, all of whom knew more or less about the accident, but the combined testimony did not reveal many facts which were not already known.

About the only things emphasized at the hearing were that the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company had taken every possible precaution to prevent an accident on the elevated by equipping cars and stations with proper signals and apparatus. It was also shown to the evident satisfaction of the state officials that all the signals and apparatus were in proper running order at the time of the collision of the two trains.

The important question, which nobody has been able to answer, is why the regular elevated train stopped between the Thirty-sixth and Twenty-fifth street stations, where it was run into by a second train—was given very little attention. In fact, nobody seemed to care much about why the train did stop and few questions were asked concerning this point. There was much evidence to show that the motors and brakes on this train were in perfect order, but beyond that little was said about the unusual occurrence of the trains stopping between stations.

All of the evidence taken by the commission tended to the same conclusion—that the entire blame for the accident rested with Cahill, the motorman of the colliding train, who was killed. Edward Taylor, an electric-

af examiner of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit wrecked trains shortly after the collision, testified that he found the controller on the motor of the car run by Cahill in operative position and not set or dropped, showing that the power had not been turned off even after the collision. Several guards and train hands said that they did not feel any slack in the pace of the second train before the collision.

W. A. Dempsey, train clerk, stationed at Thirty-sixth street, said that the first train, which stopped between stations, did not blow any danger signals. He said he thought that the trains must have been stalled and that he plainly saw the red lights which, it is claimed, were swung at the rear of the train while it was standing still.

Frank Hower, a guard on the first train, said that he saw the motorman on his train trying to fix some part of his motor. He said he saw no lights displayed, but was not very sure about it. He said, after he had thought about it for a little, that there must have been some lights. James George, a motorman employed about the Thirty-sixth street station, made up the second train and said that it worked all right when he turned it over to Cahill. He said he saw the train pulled out of the Thirty-sixth street station.

Commissioner Baker tried hard to find out whether Cahill had any trouble on his mind which would tend to distract his attention from his employment. He asked many questions as to Cahill's family relations, but was not able to find that there was anything unusual the trouble with the unfortunate motorman. Half a dozen employes said that they saw Cahill shortly before the accident and that he appeared to be perfectly well. There was no trouble or sickness in his family, so far as was known. Friends of the dead motorman said that he was a man of few words and that he would not have been apt to confide his troubles to his associates.

One thing which seemed to make a strong impression with Commissioner Baker and Engineer Barnes, who assisted in the examination, was that there was no apparatus on the trains by which they could be stopped in case of danger, from any of the cars in the train. Most elevated cars in other cities have an auxiliary brake system, which can be operated from any car and which is supposed to be used in emergency cases. The such an equipment should be provided in this borough.

At 4 o'clock the hearing was adjourned, with the privilege of resuming again next week if it should be deemed desirable. It was evident that the commission was not entirely satisfied with the results obtained and wanted a little time to think it over. It was stated that a decision would be announced next week.

<sup>50</sup> "L Wreck Not Cleared Up By State Hearing," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 22 November 1903, page 49, col. 1; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 1903).

## INVESTIGATING WRECK ON BROOKLYN ELEVATED

### Railroad Commissioner Hears Testimony That Blames Motorman.

**Evidence is Introduced, However, of Cahill's Trustworthiness—Kept His Hand on Controller Until the Crash.**

Frank M. Baker of the State Railroad Commission heard testimony yesterday in regard to the accident on the Fifth Avenue elevated line of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit system on Thursday evening, in which the conductor and motorman of one of the trains lost their lives. The hearing was for the purpose of fixing, if possible, the responsibility for the accident, and the witnesses were questioned by Mr. Baker and by Charles R. Barnes, the Railroad Commission's electrical expert.

The testimony taken during the morning and afternoon from a large number of officials and employes of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit system seemed to show that the dead motorman, John Cahill, was to blame for the disaster. Witnesses testified that the electrical equipment of the train which Cahill ran was in good working order; that with which Cahill's train collided were properly set, and that an additional red lantern was waved from the rear car of the first train when that train came to a stop.

Cahill's good character, steady habits, and general trustworthiness were sworn to by all the witnesses who were personally acquainted with him, and it also was shown that on the day previous to the accident he had worked ten hours and had fourteen hours' rest before he reported on duty on Thursday afternoon. None of the guards on his train could say that the power had been turned off or the brakes applied, and they all said that they would have noticed it if such a thing had been.

The controller on the rear train was automatic, and if Cahill had taken his hand off the controller, it would have reverted to zero and the power would have been cut off. It was suggested as an explanation for the accident that the motorman and the conductor, Patrick Cahill, were in conversation at the time and did not see the tail lights of the train that had stopped in front of them, but as both were killed, the fact would be difficult to prove.

A. J. Wilson, who was in the wreck, saw Cahill three or four minutes before the accident and said that, in his opinion, the motorman was busy in his cab and did not look down the track to see the train stalled before him. W. O. Wood, the Superintendent of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit elevated lines, explained the lights and signals and was positive that all were in perfect order.

The first train, on which the motorman was Jesse R. Donaldson, left the Thirty-sixth Street Station at 5:11 P. M. and had gone but a few hundred feet when a fuse blew out and the train came to a stop. Cahill's train, which had left the Thirty-sixth Street Station three minutes later, came along at the rate of twenty miles an hour or more, and crashed into it. C. F. Strausberg, the foreman at Thirty-sixth Street, testified that inspection of the two motor cars in the wreck showed that they were in perfect condition on Thursday morning, and inspectors reports on cars, Strausberg said that the brakes on the two rear cars of the colliding train were set, but as the train line was broken after the crash it was not possible to determine whether the brakes had been put on before or after the accident. He said that he was convinced that the controller operated by Cahill had not been used to shut off the power, and the current was on in full power at the time of the wreck.

The motorman of the forward train had testified that he did not know what had caused his train to come to a stop. He said that when he went to turn on the current after his train had come down the incline, the power did not respond to the controller. It was about a minute later that the crash came.

Edward Taylor, whose duty it is to test electrical apparatus on the cars, said that when he went aboard the first train after the accident, a surgeon of the Norwegian Hospital had requested him to move the cars if possible to the Twenty-fifth Street station. The car, said the electrician, moved along as soon as contact with a live rail was obtained. He said that an inspection led him to believe that the motorman had never taken his hand off the controller.

It was explained that the cause of the fire was the contact of the iron work of the car which had been derailed with the third rail. Frank E. Cooley, a special inspector on the road, gave details as to available fire apparatus. At the Thirty-sixth Street station, he said, there were two derrick wreckers, with axes, hammers, and a full wrecking equipment. Axes and hammers were not kept in the cars, he said, on account of the danger of their being stolen. At most of the stations, he added, there were a number of fire extinguishers, and wrecking cars were in readiness at different portions of the system.

Commissioner Baker left for Buffalo last night and will be in Binghamton on Tuesday. The testimony will be transcribed in the meantime and he will decide whether or not it will be necessary to hold another hearing. If more testimony is taken an endeavor will be made to find witnesses who will tell what Cahill did during his fourteen hours off previous to reporting for duty on the day of the accident.

<sup>51</sup> "Investigating Wreck on Brooklyn Elevated," *The New York Times*, 22 November 1903, p. 11, col. 4, image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

## BLAME B. R. T. FOR CRASH ON FIFTH AV. L NOV. 19.

Coroner's Jurymen Declare That  
Two Motormen Should Be  
in Each Box.

### EVIDENCE AT THE INQUEST.

Cahill Believed to Have Been Stricken  
Before the Fatal Collision and  
Unable to Act.

The verdict of the coroner's jury at the inquest held last night into the accident on the Fifth avenue elevated line, two weeks ago, which resulted in the death of two employes and injuries to nearly a score of persons, was that the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, through carelessness, was responsible for the collision and resultant fatalities. The necessity of having two men in the motor box on all trains was pointed out. John J. Cahill, who was roasted to death, was helpless when the accident occurred. John Cahill, conductor of the colliding car, was the other victim. He was not related to the motorman.

The death of John J. Cahill was the immediate subject of the inquest and the verdict returned by the jury after deliberating for about an hour and a half, was:

"We find that the death of John J. Cahill was caused by the burning of a car on the elevated structure of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, at Fifth avenue and Thirtieth street, due to a collision of two trains of the above company. In our opinion the collision was caused by the carelessness of the management of the said company, and

we recommend that two motormen be placed in each motor box to prevent a like accident as in our opinion the motorman in charge of this train was stricken when the collision occurred."

The inquest was held in the coroner's office in the Borough Hall, and was presided over by Coroner Flaherty. The accident occurred about 5 o'clock on the evening of November 19, and was caused by a train bound for the bridge, and in charge of John J. Cahill and John Cahill, colliding with a train that had been stalled.

The first witness was Jesse Donaldson, motorman of the stalled train. He said that when he left the yard his train was in good condition, but when he had reached a point near Thirtieth street, he noticed a decrease in speed. The lights were burning in the cars, showing that the power had not been turned off, so he concluded that the machinery was out of order. He stopped the train and stepped out to make an examination. He noticed, he testified, that Charles Hart, a guard on his train, had taken a red light to the rear and was warning approaching trains. He was looking over the machinery when the crash came and although knocked from his feet, managed to get away without harm.

Hart testified that the train was all right and that he displayed the danger signals to the colliding train. Thomas Nolan gave similar testimony and added that he and other guards had helped the passengers of the

Edward McCann, a guard, testified that there were about forty-five passengers in the colliding train and that when the crash came, men began to jump from the windows. The women tried to follow, but McCann and others assured them that they were in no danger and they followed the advice of the train hands.

He added that he and other employes were within a few feet of the car in which Motorman Cahill and Conductor Cahill were killed, but he declared that no cries of distress were heard. This testimony was elicited in view of the fact that citizens had said that twenty minutes after the collision, they heard cries of help coming from the car.

All the witnesses were train men and their testimony was much alike, all testifying that the necessary precautions had been taken to avoid such an accident.

<sup>52</sup> "Blame B.R.T. For Crash On Fifth Av. L Nov. 19," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 5 December 1903, p. 22, col. 5; image copy, *Newspapers.com* (<http://www.newspapers.com> : accessed 16 July 2018).

**APPENDIX C:**  
**The Brooklyn Rapid Transit System**

## Atlantic Avenue Station of the Fifth Avenue Line of the Bay Ridge Elevated Train<sup>53</sup>



Photo courtesy of Library of Congress

This photo provides a sense of what the elevated train on the Fifth Avenue Line looked like in the early 1900s. This photo was taken between 1910 – 1920. The motorman sat in the front section and it was open air on the sides for passengers.

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<sup>53</sup> Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016815535/> : accessed 17 September 2018).

## Brooklyn Rapid Transit: Fifth Avenue Line Stops<sup>54</sup>



John Cahill’s train departed the 36th Street station and travelled to the 25th Street station. The accident occurred between 29th Street and 30th Street, adjacent to Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn.

<sup>54</sup> “Fifth Avenue Line (Brooklyn elevated),” *Wikipedia.org* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth\\_Avenue\\_Line\\_\(Brooklyn\\_elevated\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Avenue_Line_(Brooklyn_elevated))) : accessed 17 September 2018).