

[French, Benjamin and Russell and Herbert]

Train Kills Father and Two Sons

Benjamin French, Bethel Native, Drives Car on Howells Crossing in Front of Erie Limited

Benjamin Harrison French, aged 41, a native of Mongaup Valley; his two sons, Russell and Herbert, aged 15 and 11, all of Middletown, were killed at 6:30 last Thursday evening, when Mr. French drove his light sedan on the Erie railroad tracks at the crossing in Howells and the car was hit by the Erie Limited, eastbound. The two boys were killed instantly, and the father died on reaching the Horton hospital in Middletown.

Mr. French, who was a plumber employed by his uncle in Middletown, started out after supper with the two boys to drive to the Howells creek to wash the car, as they had done before. Hazel, twin sister of Herbert, intended going also, but changed her mind and stayed home. At the crossing in Howells French stopped his car to let a westbound train, No. 23, go by. After this train passed, Mr. French saw Wesley Howell of Howells drive across the track and he followed, notwithstanding that the signal lights and bells were still going. As the French car got on the tracks the Erie Limited came along and hit the rear end of the sedan. The younger boy's body was tossed to the side of the track a half mile from the crossing, while the bodies of the other boy and father were taken from the wrecked car as it hung on the pilot of the locomotive when the train was stopped three-fourths of a mile from the scene of the accident.

French was born at Mongaup Valley in the town of Bethel Feb. 26, 1891, a son of Samuel Nelson French and Eliza Clendennen. Going to Middletown about twenty-five years ago, he was married on Dec. 22, 1911 to Lizzie Randolph, who survives with one daughter and his mother. French was a member of Christ Universalist church, the Odd Fellows, and past president of the plumbers' union. He was a powerful and courageous man. One night in April, 1919, he engaged in a struggle with two burglars in his home on Vail avenue, and despite that he was hit a severe blow on the head with a pipe by one of the burglars, he captured one of them. French carried some life insurance.

Joint funeral services were held Sunday afternoon in the Universalist church, and burial was in the Howells cemetery.

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