

CUYAHOGA VALLEY TOWPATH TRAIL CENSUS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER - MAY 2023
(CVTTC)

HISTORY & FACTS of the MAY CENSUS

May	13-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS							
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
86 / 1,202	90 / 763	86 / 786	83 / 1,018	104 / 1,150	81 / 808	82 / 1,014	89 / 1,213	97 / 1,040
2019	2020	2021	2022					
102 / 1,171	85 / 933	98 / 1,146	103 / 1,014					

Most Species seen in May : 104 on 05/09/2014.

Most Total Birds seen in May : 1,213 on 05/12/2017.

Fewest Species seen in May : 81 on 05/09/2015.

Fewest Total Birds seen in May : 763 on 05/07/2011.

Species Average in May : 91.2 Species.

Total Birds Average in May : 1,019.8 Individuals.

Lowest Temperature on May Census : 34-degrees F on 05/07/2020.

Highest Temperature on May Census : 89-degrees F on 05/07/2011.

Longest Time Afield on May Census : 12 hours & 10 minutes on 05/07/2020.

Shortest Time Afield on May Census : 7 hours & 15 minutes on 05/08/2010.

LAST MAY'S FIELD REPORT

05/05/23	TOTAL SPECIES:	103	START / END TIME:	6:15am - 4:55pm		
	TOTAL BIRDS:	1,014	TIME AFIELD:	10:55	FT. MI.:	11.00
	TEMP.:	34F ~ 41F ~ 38F		ROUTE:	Red Lock Trailhead south, with a stop at Trail Mix in Peninsula, to Bath Rd. (census route cut short due to time restraints).	
OBSERVERS:	Katie Clink, John Henry and Douglas W. Vogus.					
CONDITIONS:	Mostly cloudy all day with a few breaks of partly sunny.					
TRAIL CONDITIONS:	Good.					
RIVER CONDITIONS:	Slightly above normal from rain earlier in the week.					

NOTE: I went back out the following day (05/06), to make up for the fact that this month's census ended early at Bath Rd. This added another 2 hours and 25 minutes to the total coverage for May and two more foot miles.

FIVE YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL

On May 05, 2018 we set a census high for, arguably, Ohio's most beautiful woodpecker species, the striking Red-headed Woodpecker. Rarely is this stunning woodpecker found in large numbers along the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census route, with almost all sightings coming from the area known as "Stanford Swamp." This area has the openness and dead and dying timber preferred by this species for both nesting and foraging.

MAY 2023's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

DESCRIPTION: *This flashy, distinctive woodpecker is a familiar sight over much of eastern and central North America but can be surprisingly inconspicuous at times. It occupies a variety of semi-open woodlands. All ages show white secondaries and a white rump, contrasting with dark remaining upperparts. **ADULT:** The bright red head, neck, and throat contrast with the black back and pure white underparts; a narrow ring of black borders the red throat. The sexes are similar. **JUVENILE:** Brownish on the head and upperparts, with blackish bars through the white secondary patch and some brown streaking and scaling below; adultlike plumage is attained gradually over the first winter; most spring birds retain some black in secondaries.*

LENGTH: 8 & 1/2" to 9 & 1/2" **WINGSPAN:** 16" to 18"

VOICE: **CALL:** *A loud "queark" or "queeah," given in breeding season, is harsher and sharper than rolling "churr" of the Red-bellied Woodpecker; also a dry, guttural rattle and, in flight, a "chug". **DRUM:** A simple or two-part roll, lasting about a second and consisting of 20-25 beats.*

HABITS: *From perch on wooden posts, tops or sides of tall trees and utility poles, darts out into air to catch flying insects; apparently rarely drills into trees for insects, although it does some drilling for grubs in dead wood; animal food about 50% of diet, includes ants, wasps, beetles, millipedes, and spiders; vegetable food includes corn, dogwood berries, strawberries, cherries, grapes, acorns, beechnuts; will come to feeders for suet, sunflower seeds, cracked corn and nuts.*

NESTING: **NEST:** *Drills a cavity 8-24 inches deep usually in dead tops or stumps of oaks, ashes, maples, elms, sycamores, cottonwoods, willows, etc., about 5 to 80 feet above ground, sometimes in natural cavities, and on treeless prairies, under roofs of houses, in fence posts, or in utility poles, also in nestboxes provided to it. Its nesting hole is often taken over by non-native European Starling. **EGGS:** Over most of range, early May into July, 4 to 7 eggs, commonly 5, white in color. **INCUBATION:** By both sexes, about 14 days; two broods in some parts of range.*

HABITAT: *In summer, lives in open groves of large trees or those scattered in old fields and pastures, also likes cut-over forest "slashings" and lives about tree stubs in burned-over pine and deciduous tracts, also along river bottoms.*

RANGE: *Resident from southern Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, east to southwest and southern Ontario, southern Quebec, New York, and southern New Hampshire, south through central Montana, eastern Wyoming, and central Colorado, to northern New Mexico, central Texas, Gulf coast, and southern Florida. Has strayed to Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Utah and Arizona; first live one reported from California in 1971. Irregular migrations southward from northern parts of range and local movements in fall and winter prompted by scarcity or lack of acorns and beechnuts.*

STATUS: *Uncommon to fairly common; New England breeding populations are nearly gone, and strong declines have been noted in the mid-Atlantic states, some of the Great Lakes states, Florida, and elsewhere.*

Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the Red-headed Woodpecker in Northeast Ohio.



- CCCCCCC = Common to Abundant. Frequently encountered in this region during this time of year.
- uuuuuuuu = Uncommon. Occurs regularly during this time of year but not frequently detected.
- rrrrrrrrrr = Rare. These birds can occur more or less annually but are easily missed in their scant presence in the region.
- oooooo = Occasional. Limited history in this region and are not to be expected.
- ***** = Accidental. Few records in the past 60 years. Not expected in this region during this time of year.
- ||||| = Fluctuating Abundance. May occur some years yet absent other years. Irruptive or overwintering birds.

History of the Red-headed Woodpecker on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 ~ present.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.								
FEB.								
MAR.			1					
APR.								
MAY		1	1	1	3	2	1	2
JUN.	2			1		2	3	2
JUL.	3	1	3				1	1
AUG.	3						2	
SEP.	1	1		2	2	4	2	3
OCT.			1	1				
NOV.								
DEC.				1				

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
JAN.		1				
FEB.		1				
MAR.						
APR.			1			
MAY	5*	2	3		3	
JUN.	3	2	1		1	
JUL.	1	1	2	1		
AUG.	3		1			
SEP.	4	4	2	3		
OCT.	1					
NOV.	1					
DEC.						

DID YOU KNOW?:

After the introduction of the European Starling in the 1890's, which competed with Red-headed Woodpeckers for nest holes, the species was markedly reduced in numbers especially after 1900, with further losses in the 1930's, and still substantially reduced into the early 1970's.

- * = HIGHEST COUNT TOTAL ON CENSUS.
- BOLD # = HIGHEST COUNT FOR THAT YEAR.



The Red-headed Woodpecker can be amazingly inconspicuous for a bird so stunningly flashy.

(photo by: Burline Pullin)

MAY'S DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW?:

What's a disaster without a little mystery? Part II of the Ashtabula Train Wreck continues, as we focus on the engineer, Charles Collins. The following is from Jane Ann Turzillo, who was a police reporter for a weekly newspaper in the late 1970's and early 1980's, from her book, "Unsolved Murders & Disappearances in Northeast Ohio."

PART II: QUESTIONS LINGER ABOUT ENGINEER'S DEATH

This is a case about a single bullet fired almost 140 years ago from a six-shooter navy revolver measuring eleven inches in length. That bullet killed Charles Collins, chief engineer of the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad (LS&MS). At that time, his death was ruled a suicide. A year later, two autopsy reports by two renowned physicians from New York City would tell a different story.

Fifty-two-year-old Charles Collins had been greatly affected by the horrific train accident that slaughtered close to one hundred people when the Ashtabula Bridge collapsed on Decembr 29, 1876. Although he was the engineer when the iron bridge was built eleven years before the tragedy, he never gave his approval of it. He was not experienced in iron bridge construction, instead preferring masonry construction. In fact, Collins was against the bridge design, and he contemplated handing in his resignation if it went forward. Instead, he shifted its responsibility to the railroad's president, Amasa Stone, who designed the bridge and pushed for its construction.

Railroad bridges during the nineteenth century frequently collapsed. Iron bridges were especially prone to failure. The Ashtabula Bridge was built using iron Howe trusses fabricated by the Cleveland Rolling Mill Company. Stone's brother, Andros, was the president of the company. It was Stone's experiment of sorts because most Howe truss bridges were built of wood beams and iron rods. Joseph Tomlinson, a civil engineer employed by the railroad, warned Stone that the beams were inadequate. Stone's answer was to fire Tomlinson. Although Collins refused to have anything to do with designing or building the bridge, he felt some responsibility for the disaster. Tomlinson claimed Collins knew the bracing was not adequate. The bridge was in Collins's stretch of the railroad, so it was up to him to inspect it. He had the structure tested with the weight of three locomotives eleven days before the catastrophe.

The last time Collins was seen alive was at his office on Water Street in Cleveland, where he worked until nine o'clock on Wednesday evening, January 17, 1877. His wife, Mary, whom he had married in 1856, was in Ashtabula visiting her parents, Edwin and Miranda Harmon. Since his colleagues had not seen him in three days, they thought he had joined Mary there. Finally, when no one had seen or heard from him by Saturday morning, January 19, (should be the 20th.?) Isaac C. Brewer, an assistant from the Toledo division of the railroad, decided to go to his house at the corner of St. Clair and Seneca Streets.

Collins's hired man lived in quarters at the back of the house. He told Brewer he had not seen Collins for a few days and thought Collins was in Ashtabula. Still concerned, Brewer decided to have a look for himself. Everything was quiet. Nothing seemed out of order as he walked through the house. Then he got to the bedroom. His pulse must have started to race when he realized he had to force his way into the locked room. Collins was dead.

His body was perfectly stretched out on the bed. Blood had run from his mouth and ears and drenched the pillow beneath his head. His corpse was obviously in a state of decomposition, and the smell was terrible. A revolver rested loosely in Collins's left hand. His arms were lying parallel to his thighs. The gun hand rested slightly on his left thigh. The dead man was right handed. A fully loaded double-barreled pistol was on the bed on the right. Brewer knew about these guns. Collins kept the larger one under the mattress on his side of the bed. Mary kept the smaller one under her pillow. No one seemed to wonder why both Collins and his wife slept with guns at the ready. Was Cleveland so dangerous during that era that Collins and his wife felt the need to arm themselves? Or did they have some other fear?

Brewer backed out of the room without touching anything and called for the coroner. It was Coroner Frederick Fliedner's opinion that Collins had been dead for thirty-six to forty-eight hours, placing the death date sometime on January 18. To him, the cause of death was plainly suicide, and he decided against holding an inquest. Fliedner thought Collins had put the muzzle of the eleven-inch navy revolver in his mouth and pulled the trigger. He observed the revolver in Collins's left hand but must have dismissed the fact that the dead man was right handed. Three chambers of that gun were empty, but only one wound to Collins's head was evident. According to the "Plain Dealer," Fliedner saw no bullet hole on the headboard, but there was a hole in the wall that looked to be recent and the right size. It was never verified that a bullet was found in the wall. An autopsy one year later would note a nick on the headboard of the bed and another in the closet woodwork and a piece of flattened lead on the floor. If the hole in the wall and the ricochet bullet on the floor accounted for two of the empty chambers of the gun, what happened to the third?

The bedclothes were neatly pulled up to just above his waist. This led the coroner to believe death was instantaneous and there was no movement of the body. No mention was made of blood splatter, just the blood-soaked pillow. An unopened razor lay on the the left side of the bed near the killing weapon, and Mary Collins's derringer lay on the right side of the bed. It apparently had not been fired. The bed chamber was in perfect order. It looked as though Charles Collins had retired as usual. His clothing was draped over a chair near the bed, and his shoes and stockings were on the floor close by. His collar with the necktie tucked inside was on a stand in front of the mirror. Curiously, his vest was found under the mattress at the head of the bed. No explanation was ever given for this. Perhaps there was something of value in the pocket? An envelope addressed to his wife was found in a basket on a stand. Thinking it might be a suicide note, the coroner snatched it up. It was not we he had hoped. It read: "No. 10 will leave at 11:15. No. 8 at 2:45." Flidner noted that Collins's valuables had not been disturbed. A diamond pin and studs, which were still affixed to his shirt, as well as his money and watch, were given to a friend for safe keeping.

Collins's friends and family were in a state of shock at his death, particularly the horrific way he died. They went back over the preceding few weeks trying to make sense of it. Collins had a sensitive nature and was deeply upset about the lives lost in the catastrophic accident. He wept openly - like a child - when he first saw the vast pile of rubble, the fires, the bodies and the thieves who preyed on the dead and weakened victims. He did not hesitate to wade into the waist-deep, frigid water of the creek where the train landed to help save as many as he could. For three weeks after the accident, he often broke down in tearful grief.

On New Year's Day at his in-laws' house in Ashtabula, he walked out onto the porch for a bit of fresh air. A passerby wished him a Happy New Year, and Collins returned the greeting. He then went back in the house and sat down to breakfast, but he did not eat. Instead, his emotions spilled out. "John wished me a Happy New Year. How can it be a Happy New Year to me?" he asked.

Even before the accident, Collins had complained of being overworked. "If they don't give me help in my work, I shall go crazy," he told a professional friend. Overwork, combined with the devastation of the wreck, took its toll on him. Collins was considered to be at the top of his profession. He was a much-admired man. The Collinwood district in Cleveland was named for him. Most of his colleagues agreed he was extremely conscientious. "There is not a better track or construction engineer in the country than Charlie Collins," said Lake Shore general superintendent Charles Paine.

Collins was born in Brunswick, New York, in 1826 to Dr. Robert L. and Amelia Collins. After receiving a liberal education at an eastern college, he graduated from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and was full of promise. His thirty-year career with the railroads began in New England, where he was in charge of work on the Boston and Albany Railroad. He came to Ohio in 1849 to take charge of locating the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and Indianapolis road. He moved to the Painseville & Ashtabula Railroad as superintendent for a short period. When the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad consolidated, he became its chief engineer and helped locate its road. He remained with the LS&MS until the end, except for a brief time during the construction of the Mahoning Railroad. George B. Ely, one of the directors of the railroad, told a "Plain Dealer"

reporter that Collins was distraught and had lost his appetite and a great deal of sleep since the accident. In addition, Collins had been troubled by comments from the public. He thought the public put the blame on him. "Collins was a proud man, and thought more of his honor than of his life," Ely said. "He was of a very nervous temperament, and the worry and anxiety connected with the Ashtabula accident has worried him terribly."

On the Monday before his death, he had tendered his resignation to the board of directors of the railroad, but it was not accepted. The members of the board assured him his anxiety was unfounded. Still, it seemed to fester in his mind. He thought confidence in his abilities had been withdrawn. He vastly overrated what was said about him. He took it personally, so much so that he made this remark to Paine: "I have been thirty years working for the protection of the public, and now they turn around and kick me for something I am not to blame for, something which I had have nothing whatever to do with."

Collins's last official act was to testify before the Ohio legislative committee investigation of the disaster and to sign a document that gave all his information to a legislative committee in the investigation and prosecution of the cause of the accident. Paine had been with Collins at his office on the Wednesday before his death. A committee of the Toledo division was leaving the next morning to inspect bridges in that area, and Collins had agreed to go with them. On Thursday morning, he did not show up to travel with them, so they assumed he had gone on ahead and was somewhere along the road. When no one had heard from him by Saturday morning, Brewer went to his house. Collins had evidently intended to go on that inspection tour, as his travel bag was packed and sitting in the bedroom. A new pair of boots were not far away.

There are conflicting stories about his state of mind that last day he was seen alive. His colleagues who were with him on Wednesday saw nothing in his demeanor to give anyone cause for concern. Yet Brewer had stayed with Collins on the Monday and Tuesday night before. Was he afraid to leave him alone? News of Collins's death spread fast throughout the railroad. A number of his closest associates came to his house looking for information. Only a few were allowed in to take charge of his body and valuables. While one newspaper article said the police questioned the suicide finding, another said the police were not interested. Apparently, no record survives to give a decisive answer.

On the day of Charles Collins's funeral, a large group of people wishing to pay their respects started to gather in front of his house as early as ten o'clock in the morning. Only the family, officers of the Lake Shore Railroad, prominent businessmen and his closest friends were permitted inside the house, where his casket was surrounded by standards of roses, jasmine and calla lilies. The service, which included selections from both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and the hymns "Nearer My God to Thee" and "Jesus Love of My Soul," was conducted by Reverend H.C. Haydn.

Twelve close friends and colleagues acted as pallbearers to carry the casket to the hearse. The cortege then made its way slowly through Cleveland streets to Union Depot, where a special train sat in wait to carry Collins on his last journey to Ashtabula. The conductor was F. Paige. The family, all the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad officials and a large number of

citizens accompanied the casket. A number of cars were needed to carry the mourners. Among them were the parlor cars America, Northern Crown and Stella. The train was pulled by Rapidan, one of the oldest and most reliable engines on the road. One of the longest tenured employees, engineer Nick Hartman, had the honor of being at the throttle.

Collins is interred in a mausoleum at the Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Ashtabula not far from the graves of the nineteen unidentified victims who died in the wreckage. Interestingly enough, Mary Collins bought four lots at the cemetery on January 19, 1877, one day after her husband was presumed to have died and one day before his body was discovered. The mausoleum is built on these lots. Besides Collins, it holds the remains of Mary Collins, Kittie G. Harmon and Miranda and Edwin Harmon, Mary's mother and father. Kittie is listed on Find-a-Grave as Collins's granddaughter, which is unlikely because Charles and Mary had no children. The building was quite beautiful, with black and white terrazzo floors and stained glass windows when it was built, but time has taken a toll on the structure. Now, it's in need of repair.

Isaac C. Brewer, having been the first to witness the death scene, never believed the suicide theory. George L. Converse, chairman of the joint committee of the general assembly to investigate the accident, thought Collins had been murdered. His family and several of his closest friends were adamant that it was murder. They all thought someone had been hired to kill Collins to keep him from testifying before the legislative committee.

A year later, Collins's body was exhumed, and his skull was sent to Dr. Stephen Smith, a surgeon at Bellair and St. Vincent's Hospitals in New York City. Smith was also a professor of surgical jurisprudence at University Medical College in New York. It was his job to give a full and unbiased examination of the skull. On June 3, 1878, Smith issued a fourteen-page, handwritten report. In looking at the openings where the bullet entered and exited the skull and fractures that it caused, Smith's assessment was different than that of Cleveland's coroner, Frederick Fliedner. Whereas the Cleveland coroner decided Collins had put the gun in his mouth and shot up through the roof of his mouth, Smith discovered the ball had actually entered the skull toward the back of the head approximately four inches behind the left ear and exited approximately five inches above the right ear, still toward the back of the head. Traces of lead were evident at both holes. The impact pushed Collins's brain forward, fracturing the bones behind his eyes. This may have caused what was thought to be a blow to the head.

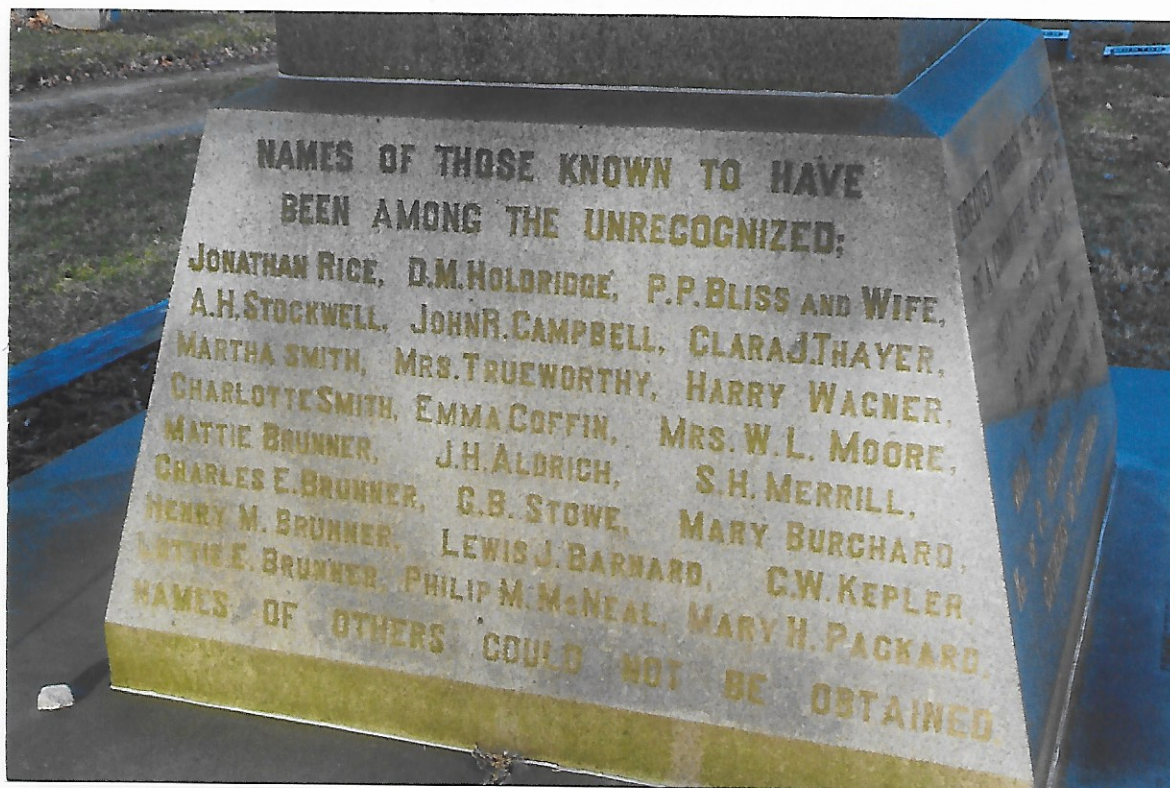
The opening on the right side proved that the ball escaped the skull, evidence that the gun had been held four or more inches away. Smith stated that all experiments made with a six-shooter navy revolver eleven inches in length uniformly found that when the muzzle of that type of gun was held close to the skull, the ball did not escape the scalp. Although it may have made a fracture in the bone, it would fall back into the cavity of the skull. Because the ball was eventually found, it was fact that the ball had exited Collins's head. At the time of Collins's death, there was little mention about whether Fliedner found the ball, but Smith stated that there were dents in the mahogany headboard and woodwork of the closet, which was in proximity to the bed. A flattened ball was found on the floor just below the closet. In Smith's opinion, the wound was not immediately fatal because its path "did not involve vital parts of the brain, nor large blood vessels."

Collins was right handed, and the navy revolver was found in his left hand. Smith contended that it would have been close to impossible for the dead man to hold that size gun in his non-dominant hand at an angle at least four inches away from the spot where the ball entered his skull. He would have had to strongly avert his head. Even so, he could not see where the muzzle of the gun would have been pointed. Smith further stated that, when the gun recoiled, Collins's

hand would have fallen over the side of the bed, and the gun would have been thrown some distance from the bed. Smith also noted that the body and bed linens had not been disturbed, which was inconsistent with a suicide. He described the different conditions a body might suffer at gunshot suicide - shock, paralysis and unconsciousness. These would have led to cerebral irritation, and the body would have suffered spasms. None of that would be consistent with smooth bed linens and a body in a natural position. At the end of the document, Smith stated, "My opinion is that Mr. Collins came to his death by a shot wound inflicted by other hands than his own."

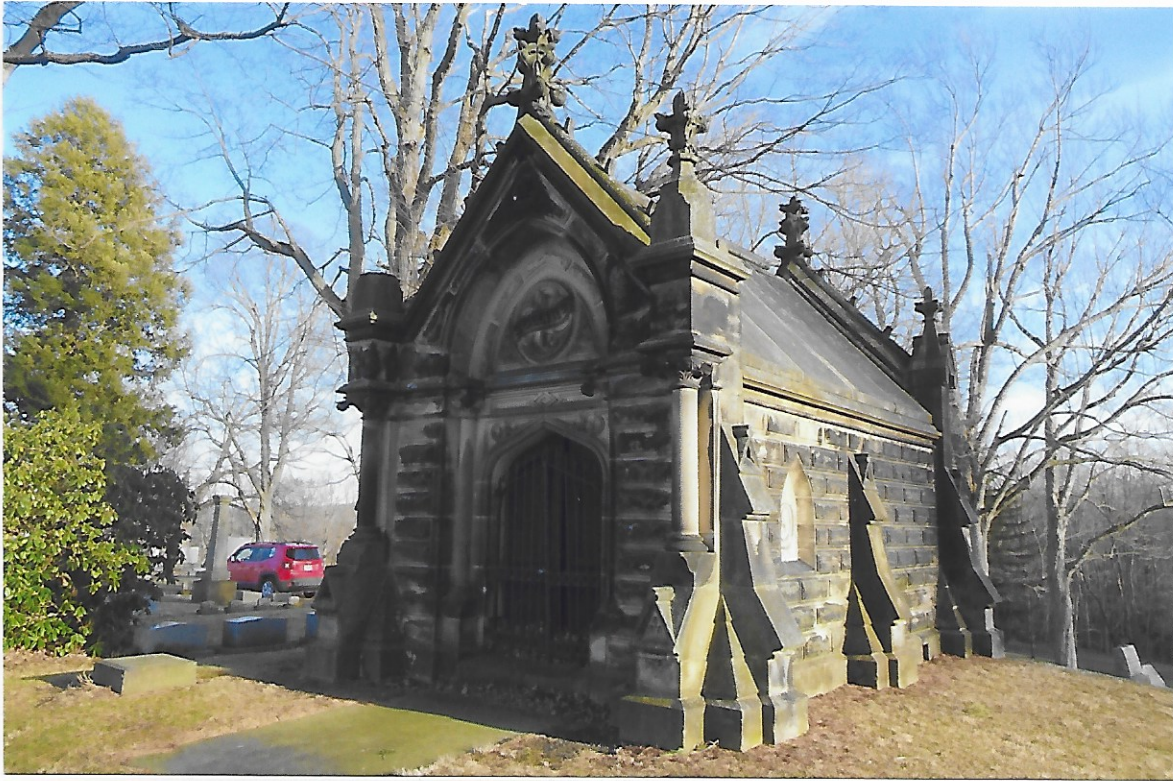
Dr. Frank Hasting Hamilton, a colleague of Smith's at the medical college, concurred, saying that it was highly unlikely that a right-handed man would use his left hand to shoot himself when nothing appeared wrong with his right hand. He added, "If Mr. Collins was rendered immediately unconscious and was completely paralyzed and remained so until death (which was probably the fact) the position of the left arm and hand and of the revolver is not satisfactorily explained upon the suicide theory." He felt Collins's life "was taken by another person while he was lying asleep in his bed." Hamilton also felt Collins's left arm, hand and the revolver were arranged after death.

The two autopsy reports were not made public at the time, maybe to protect whoever killed Collins and to stave off any more scandal from the accident. Both autopsies were found tucked away in a box full of documents bought at an auction in the early 1900's by a woman named Mrs. Terrill. Her son, William Terrill of Geauga County found them and gave them to Alice Bliss of the Ashtabula Historical Genealogical Society around 1975. Drs. Smith and Hamilton answered the question of whether Collins died by his own hand or that of someone else. The question that still remains is who shot that bullet from Charles Collins's eleven-inch-long navy revolver?



Headstone at the bottom of the Ashtabula Train Disaster memorial. Just some that could be identified or accounted for.

(photo by: Douglas W. Vogus)



Collins's large mausoleum at Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Ashtabula indicates that he was a respected man of importance.

(photo by: Douglas W. Vogus)

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