

Man, 80, killed by train;

officials suspect suicide

LEDGER, Pete (PROSPER)

9/28/76

An 80-year-old Grinnell man who earlier wandered away from a Congregate Meals program at the Veterans Memorial Building was killed by a Rock Island freight train west of Grinnell early Tuesday.

Dead is Pete Ledger, who since Sept. 17 had been hospitalized at the long-term care facility at Grinnell General Hospital.

Authorities said the death was an apparent suicide, although an autopsy was scheduled to determine the exact cause of death.

To Restroom

Grinnell General Hospital Administrator Robert Sheeder said Ledger was among seven patients from the long-term care facility who were taken to the Memorial Building for the Congregate Meals program Tuesday noon. Ledger

reportedly asked to go the restroom at about 12:45 p.m. An attendant accompanied him to the door of the restroom, and when Ledger went in, the attendant returned to check on other patients. Ledger, however, apparently left the building, and a search began.

Grinnell police, officials of the hospital, and workers from the Poweshiek County Department of Social Services spent the remainder of the day and night looking for Ledger.

'Combed Town'

"We combed the town," Sheeder said, "calling his guardian and all his friends and neighbors. We watched his home on Reed St. near the railroad tracks, hoping that he'd find his way there."

Ledger, who has no relatives in the Grinnell area, was described by hospital and

Social Services officials as having been "confused and restless." He had been referred to Social Services by neighbors who expressed concern for his well-being, and a guardian was eventually appointed for him.

Shortly before 1 a.m. Wednesday, crew members on the freight train reported that the train's engine, unable to stop in time, had run over a man who was lying across the tracks about four miles west of Grinnell in Jasper County.

The body was identified as Ledger.

Attempts were being made Wednesday to find possible relatives on the East Coast and in Canada. By mid-morning, those attempts remained unsuccessful.

Services are pending at the Smith Funeral Home here.

LEDGER Rites held for train victim

9/29/76

An autopsy performed on the body of a man struck by a Rock Island freight train west of here early Wednesday failed to show "any pathology," Jasper County Medical Examiner Dr. Fred Carpenter Jr. said Friday.

The death of Prosper (Pete) Ledger, 80, will simply be listed as the result of being struck by a train, the medical examiner said.

"We had hoped, at best, to determine whether there was a possibility of death beforehand," Dr. Carpenter said, "but we were unable to do so. All we can assume is that he was alive on the tracks when the train struck him."

Across Tracks

Ledger, of 722 Reed St., was killed shortly before 1 a.m. Wednesday about four miles west of here. Train crewmen said he was lying across the tracks, and the train could not be stopped in time to avoid striking him.

Sheri Pierce of Grinnell, Mr. Ledger's executor, said Friday that he had suffered a stroke sometime last winter, and that he had been "confused and forgetful" since that time.

"He would have difficulty getting up after falling down, and he was losing his eyesight," Pierce said. "It was possible that he was using the railroad tracks to try to find his way home."

Tuesday afternoon, Ledger reportedly walked away from a Congregate Meals program at the Veterans Memorial

Building here. A day-long search conducted by area law-enforcement personnel, Grinnell General Hospital officials, and staff members of the Poweshiek County Department of Social Services, proved fruitless.

Ledger had been a patient at the long-term care facility at Grinnell General Hospital since Sept. 17.

Funeral services were held at 10:30 a.m. Friday at the Smith Funeral Home, with the Rev. John E. Epperson, pastor of the Grinnell Christian Church, officiating. Organist was Mrs. Harvey Martindale, and pallbearers included Roger Bailey, Rex Criswell, Marion Gibson, Fred Johnson, Dale Phipps, and Ted Heavis. Burial was at Hazelwood Cemetery.

Veterans graveside rites were conducted by Marion Gibson, commander; Edwin K. Richardson, chaplain; and members of the Grinnell Veterans Ceremonial Unit.

The son of Phillip and Mary Brein Ledger, he was born July 30, 1896, at St. Anthony, New Brunswick, Canada. He moved to Bangor, Me., while he was a young boy and became an American citizen. He joined the Canadian Army at the age of 17 and later joined the U.S. Army, serving in Germany during World War I. Mr. Ledger had lived in Grinnell for the past 54 years.

He is survived by a brother, Alphee Ledger of Dieppe, New Brunswick, and three sisters, Mrs. Arthur (Josephine) Mellenson of Cocagne, New Brunswick, Mrs. Lina Goguen of Dieppe, and Miss Georgina Ledger, also of New Brunswick. He was preceded in death by his parents, brothers and sisters.