

Niagara Falls was bustling with more than just the usual summer tourist traffic. The July Fourth weekend of 1903 promised to be memorable. Governor Benjamin Odell was in town. Electrical engineers were holding a convention. Local merchants were in the holiday spirit. Bear Bros. on Falls Street advertised a gigantic clearance sale on suits and cloaks. Jess on Main Street offered triple green stamps from 8:00 a.m. to noon. Railroad customers could buy a round-trip to Toronto for a special holiday price of \$1.50. A baseball game was scheduled across the river at Queen Victoria Park, between the International Theater team and one called Electric City.

BY TOM REIGSTAD

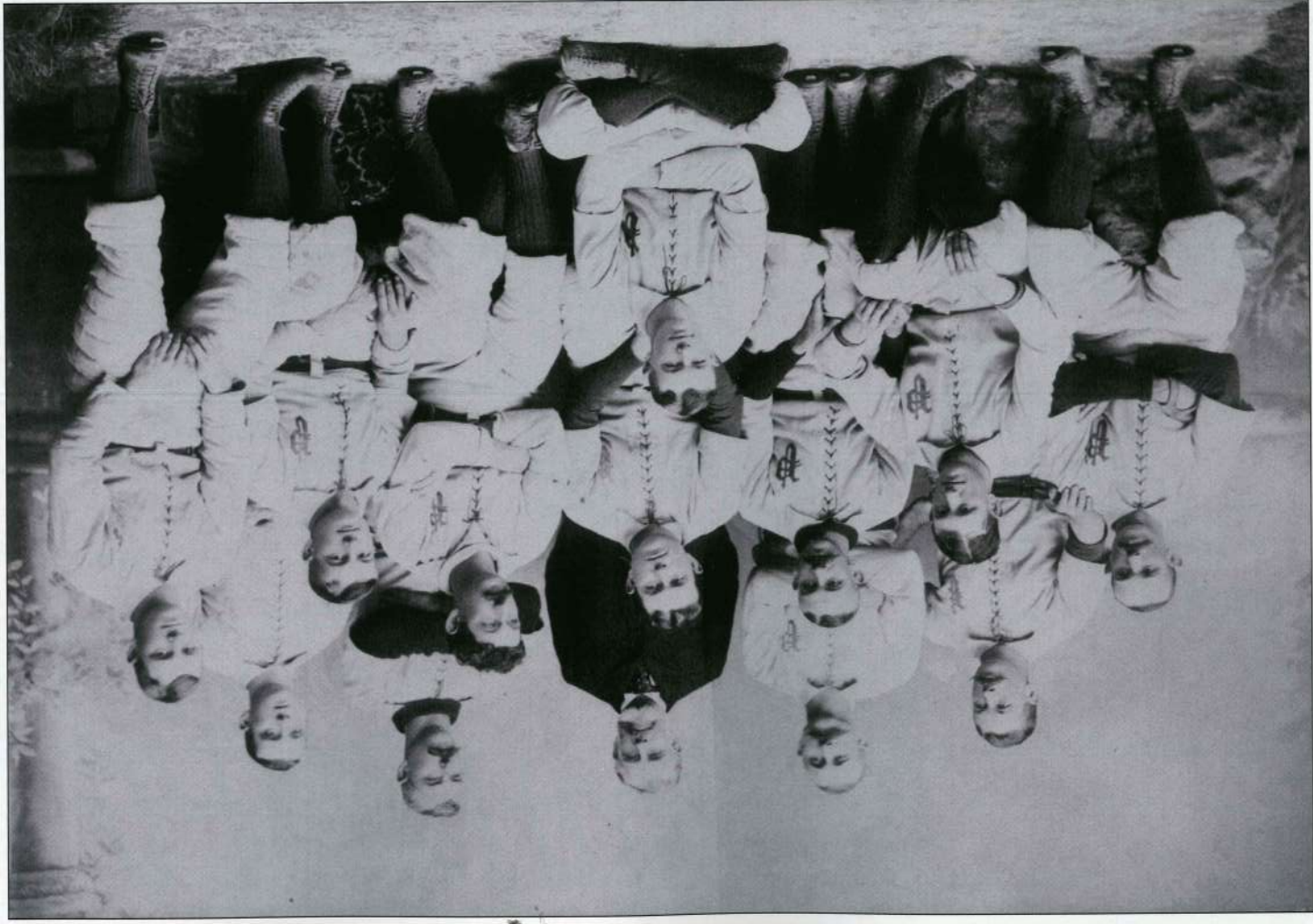
# BASEBALL STAR MYSTERIOUSLY PLUNGED TO HIS DEATH OVER THE FALLS

# Ed Delahanty's Fast Trip:



OLD JUDGE CIGARETTES  
Goodwin & Co.,  
New York.

Ed Delahanty baseball card, ca. 1898. (Background) The International Railway Bridge, ca. 1903, from the Canadian side. Library of Congress and private collection



Philadelphia Phillies team photo, 1892. Ed Delahanty is seated, second from left. Courtesy National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

But the festivities were marred on Friday, July 3 when newspapers and not a Niagara Falls conventioner. Information suggested he had been ejected that Thursday night at Bridgeburg for rowdy behavior. When fans, the Fourth of July weekend of 1903 was indeed memorable, in tragic and sensationalized ways. Even today, researchers struggle with nagging questions about Edward Delahanty's demise. Why was he, a player with the Washington Senators, traveling alone near Buffalo in the middle of the baseball season? Did he jump off the bridge into the Niagara River? Did the body was finally retrieved from the Lower Niagara River on Thursday, July 9, the public was astonished to learn that the victim was "Big Ed" Delahanty, one of Major League Baseball's superstars.

In the ensuing days, tantalizing pieces of the puzzle were published in sketchy newspaper stories. Police interviews with a train conductor and the bridge watchman, however, revealed that the victim had been a passenger on the Michigan Central of Niagara Falls, the mysterious circumstances of his death have swirled amid controversy for 120 years. For the Delahanty family and baseball fans, the Fourth of July weekend of 1903 was indeed memorable, in tragic and sensationalized ways. Even today, researchers struggle with nagging questions about Edward Delahanty's demise. Why was he, a player with the Washington Senators, traveling alone near Buffalo in the middle of the baseball season? Did he jump off the bridge into the Niagara River? Did the body was finally retrieved from the Lower Niagara River on Thursday, July 9, the public was astonished to learn that the victim was "Big Ed" Delahanty, one of Major League Baseball's superstars.

who was 14 years his junior. Soon, the newlyweds moved westward down Lake Erie to Cleveland, where they raised a large family.

Edward James Delahanty, born in 1867, was their oldest of six sons. While Jim, Tom, Joe, Frank and Willie all played professional baseball—all but one of them at the major league level—Ed was the most talented and blossomed into one of the first true baseball superstars. With the Philadelphia Phillies from 1892 to 1901, with a one-year stint in 1890 with the Cleveland Infants (who only existed for that year), Delahanty dominated the National League in major offensive categories 24 times. He batted above .400 three times, hit four home runs in a single game, and his lifetime .346 batting average still ranks among the all-time top ten in baseball history. He was also a fleet and superbly skilled defensive outfielder.

On June 25, 1903, he played the last game of his career in his hometown of Cleveland, against the Naps. Delahanty got one hit in four at-bats and sat out the rest of the series. On June 29, he traveled with the Senators by steamship to Detroit to play the Tigers. While in Detroit, however, his drinking accelerated and his mental health deteriorated dramatically. For "Big Ed" Delahanty, Detroit was the beginning of the end.

Unfortunately, Delahanty's appetites for gambling, drinking and a flashy lifestyle equaled his baseball prowess, and contributed to his undoing. He once boasted of losing \$4,000 in a single afternoon at a New Orleans racetrack. In the early 1900s, he abandoned the Phillies for a more lucrative contract with the Washington Senators of the upstart American League, and later failed in another attempt to jump to the New York Giants.

When the 1903 baseball season began, Delahanty was deeply in debt, drinking heavily and overweight, having gained 50 pounds in the off season. He was also overwrought, as his wife Norine was ill and his 35-year-old body was banged up with back and ankle injuries. His on-field production for the Washington Senators

Jim Delahanty baseball card, as a member of the Detroit Tigers. Jim was one of Ed's brothers who made it to the major leagues. Library of Congress



Jim Delahanty, one of the famous ball playing brothers, now a star with Detroit at second base, was secured and started out by Mike Finn of the Little Rock club in 1902. Delahanty hit .351 his first year out, thereby showing that the family trait was still strong within him. He played fine ball for Little Rock and in 1904 was lifted by the Boston Nationals. From there in 1906 he went to Washington as a second baseman, remaining until traded to Detroit for Ger-many Schaefer in 1909. Delahanty hit .339 and fielded .947 at first and second, where he alternated.

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# FALLS FROM BRIDGE INTO SWIFT RIVER

## Despite Efforts of Night Watchman, Stranger Carries Out Apparent Intention to Commit Suicide at International Viaduct.

Buffalo Enquirer, July 3, 1903.

Shining a lantern in Delahanty's face and ordering him off the bridge, Kingston's next actions are disputed. He first reported that Delahanty had ignored him, kept walking toward the American side and fell 25 feet into the river at a point where the drawbridge had swung open over the Black Rock Channel to allow the *Ossian Bedell*, a Grand Island steamer, to pass upriver. Kingston later gave a second version of his story. In this version, an inebriated Delahanty threatened him with a club or large lump of coal. Kingston's third story held that when Delahanty tried climbing up a bridge girder, Kingston grabbed and grappled with him, whereupon Delahanty broke free and jumped willfully into the river. Only two curious facts are certain: Kingston wore Delahanty's hat home that night and he did not report the incident until the next morning. At that point, and for days thereafter, no one was aware of Delahanty's identity.

Malcolm Colclough, Kingston's boss and foreman of the International Railway Bridge, confirmed that Kingston had told him that the ejected passenger had wielded a weapon against the bridge guard. However, a day or two later, C.J. Metcalf of the Ontario Police conducted an investigation. Metcalf inspected the area north of the bridge, walked to the drawbridge section, which is several spans out from the Canadian side, and interviewed Kingston and Colclough about the incident. Metcalf discredited the drawbridge accident theory when he realized that the draw on the sixth span was protected by automatic gates. He also identified the hat that Kingston wore as belonging to the missing ejected train passenger. The mystery deepened.

Season ticket booklet #26 was found in one of Ed Delahanty's bags left aboard the train. Further investigation confirmed the booklet belonged to him. Courtesy Jerrold Casway



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Meanwhile, the Delahanty family to the bridge victim. He opened the bags and discovered a pair of baseball shoes, a Washington Senators season pass booklet #26 and a suit, the coat to which contained a label with the name of a Washington, D.C., tailor. The tailor soon confirmed for Bennett that the suit was custom made for Ed Delahanty of the Washington Senators ball club. He also provided Bennett and Buffalo police with Delahanty's address. Bennett contacted the Senators and learned that season ticket booklet #26 belonged to Delahanty. He also alerted Norine Delahanty that the contents of the two bags belonged to her husband, who was likely the passenger "who was drowned off the bridge" late on the previous Thursday night.

Finally, on Monday morning, Bennett contacted the Senators and learned that season ticket booklet #26 belonged to Delahanty. He also alerted Norine Delahanty that the contents of the two bags belonged to her husband, who was likely the passenger "who was drowned off the bridge" late on the previous Thursday night.

on another extended bender.

printed speculating that he was just to be found, snide comments were aware that Delahanty was nowhere on the weekend, as newspapers became Bennett that the suit was custom made for Ed Delahanty of the Washington Senators ball club. He also provided Bennett and Buffalo police with Delahanty's address. Bennett contacted the Senators and learned that season ticket booklet #26 belonged to Delahanty. He also alerted Norine Delahanty that the contents of the two bags belonged to her husband, who was likely the passenger "who was drowned off the bridge" late on the previous Thursday night.

Ontario, north of Lake Erie, to the village of Bridgeburg, where it was to cross the Niagara River back into the United States. The schedule called for the train to reach Buffalo at 11:00 p.m. before proceeding to New York City. Delahanty never reached Buffalo. By the time the train approached Bridgeburg and was about to cross the 3,600-foot International Railway Bridge to Buffalo, conductor John Cole was fed up with Delahanty's rowdy behavior. The star outfielder had kept ringing the bell in the Pullman car until the conductor cut the wire. He had insisted on smoking a cigar in a non-smoking area, had swilled several glasses of whiskey and had smashed a glass case containing an emergency fire ax. If this weren't enough, he antagonized fellow passengers wielding a straight razor and pulled a female passenger out of her berth by the ankles.

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Canadian side. the telegraph office on the guard who worked out of ton, an elderly bridge confronted by Sam Kingston, not gone far before he was lights of Buffalo. He had bridge toward the bright gan walking across the he was, he apparently be- Rather than remain where nadian side of the bridge. frame building on the Ca- burg station, a small 10:45 p.m. near the Bridge- out his luggage at about and onto the tracks with- Delahanty off the train sengers, gently escorted help of a few male pas- Cole, along with the

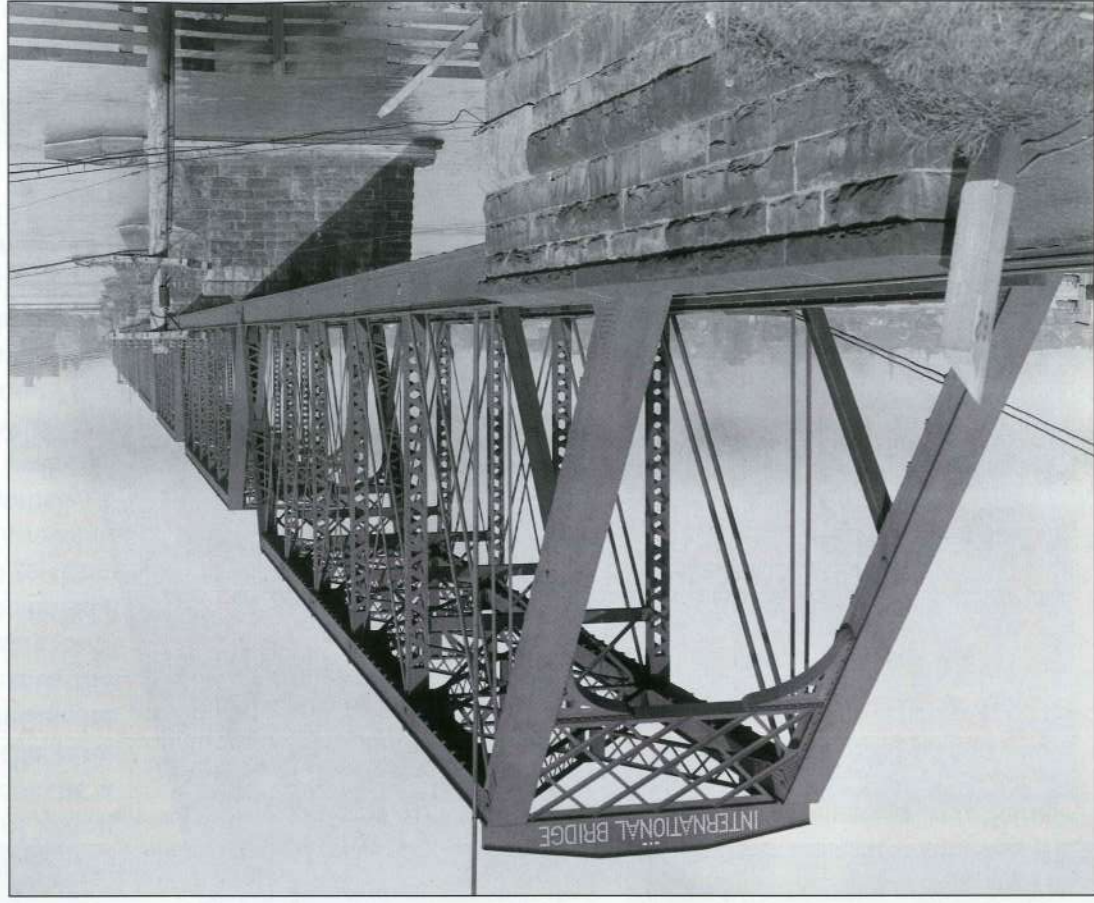
# Famous Right Fielder Departs From Washington Without Explanation.

## WASHINGTON, D. C., July 4.—Ed Delahanty, the right fielder of the Washington Baseball club, has been sold to the Lotus forces and no one on that team knows where he is. Thursday afternoon, after the Washington club went to the ball grounds in Detroit, Delahanty left his personal belongings and uniform at his hotel and departed without saying a word to anybody.

St. Paul Globe, July 5, 1903.

uniform and cap in his hotel room and abandoned the Senators, baseball and his family forever.

In the team hotel, Ed threatened himself and his roommate with a knife, went on a drinking binge and experienced paranoid delusions that his teammates were conspiring against him. His mother Bridget and youngest brother Will arrived from Cleveland to calm Ed down. But after they left, he quickly reneged on a "no drinking" pledge made to a Detroit priest. He on Thursday, July 2, at 5:25 p.m. The Michigan Central's route went across



The International Railway Bridge, ca. 1903. Photo taken from the Canadian side looking toward Buffalo, the direction Delahanty would have been travelling. Library of Congress



The Maid of the Mist approaches its Canadian landing, near where Delehanly's body was discovered. Archives of Ontario (Inset Niagara Gazette, July 9, 1903.)

On Thursday, July 9, a body was discovered by William La Blond amid a small whirlpool in the Lower Niagara River, near the Maid of the Mist landing on the Canadian side. The body was taken to Morse Funeral Home in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Late that afternoon, Ed's brother Frank, his brother-in-law E.J. Maguire and M.A. Green, a Washington Senators stockholder, positively identified the remains as Ed Delehanly. The body was mutilated from being in the water for a week, probably being hung up for a time in the craggy rocks of the surging Upper Rapids before being violently swept over the 170-foot Horseshoe Falls. Further damage may have been done by a propeller from a Maid of the Mist tourist boat. The body was wearing only a slate-colored necktie with white dots, a pair of laced black shoes and socks with red dots. No money, diamond tie pin or other jewelry were found. Undertaker Morse and his son worked all night preparing the corpse and a metal-lined container for shipment.

For some time, Delehanly's controversial death was newsworthy and much blame was directed at various parties. His brothers suspected foul play and robbery—Kingston having Delehanly's hat, as well as the fact that Delehanly's money and jewelry were missing, were often cited as question marks. Family members heatedly denied rumors that Delehanly was depressed to the point of suicide over marital discord. Norine Delehanly criticized railroad conductor Cole for not putting Delehanly off the train safely in Buffalo and simply turning him over to the police. For two years, Ed Delehanly's wife battled the Michigan Central Railroad in the Canadian courts. In May of 1904, a jury decided that conductor Cole was guilty of leaving the outfelder in a "physical and mental condition that made him entirely incapable of looking after or taking care of himself." The court awarded Norine Delehanly and her daughter a total of \$5,000. In June 1905, however, an appeals court reversed the decision. In 1945, "Big Ed" Delehanly was posthumously inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, being considered one of the greatest ball players of the 19th century and the first player in modern major league history to hit over 400 three times. ■



The Delehanly family plot in Cleveland's Calvary Cemetery. Buried along with the baseball star are sister, Florence, James and Bridget, and his younger sister, Florence. James Lacy photograph

Tom Reigstad is professor emeritus of English at Buffalo State University, where he teaches a popular course on baseball and culture. He is the author of *Scribblin' for a Livin'*—Mark Twain's Pivotal Period in Buffalo.

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