

# TRANSCRIPTS OF THE OBITUARIES OF ORSON WEST

## *Transcript of S.F. Call, 11 April 1901*

### Orson West Killed Through Redmond Johnson Turning Lever

Redmond Johnson, a bright-faced little boy in knickerbockers and nine and a half years old, told the Coroner's jury yesterday that it was by his hand that Orson C. West came to his death in the Phelan building elevator last Monday night.

The testimony of the witnesses was that Alfred L. West, a son of the victim, stepped into the elevator first. Waiting behind him were his father and Edward N. Borg. Just as the elder West stepped upon the floor of the cage, the elevator went up at full speed, crushing him against the second floor. Hugh M. Cameron, 29 years old, and in charge of the elevator, reversed the lever and brought the elevator half way down to the starting point, and the injured man fell to the bottom of the well.

Cameron said he saw Mr. Borg waiting to enter the cage after Mr. West, that he did not have hold of the lever and that the elevator ascended at full speed, as the elder Mr. West was stepping into it.

Redmond Johnson, the innocent cause of the old man's death, was very nervous and very much frightened when he took the witness chair. He said he had gone into the elevator with his father, who requested him to wait until he returned.

"I pushed the lever with my arm, and it went up as Mr. West was going in," he said. "I didn't think it was dangerous."

"You pushed it accidentally, didn't you?" inquired the Coroner.

"No, sir. I pushed it with my arm, but I didn't think anybody would get hurt."

The jury returned a verdict that Orson C. West was accidentally killed [in the] elevator of the Phelan building, "and we [-----] the owner of said building for permitting idlers to ride in the elevator during hours of public service."

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Note the difference from the earlier report:

***Transcript of S.F. Call 9 April 1901***

***Man Fatally Mangled by an elevator***

O.C. West, an Aged Napa Rancher, Killed in the Phelan Building

Orson C. West, an aged rancher residing near Napa City, met an awful death by being crushed by an elevator in the Phelan building yesterday afternoon. Mr. West and his son, Alfred L. West, an insurance agent, entered the building at about 6 o'clock to go to the younger man's offices. The son stepped into the elevator and his father, who was close behind him, had just got one foot inside the door when the elevator suddenly shot upward.

The old gentleman was thrown off his balance, and he was caught between the floor of the cage and the wall of the elevator shaft and dragged upward several feet. By this time the elevator boy had brought the cage to a standstill, and the body of the unfortunate man was dropped to the stone floor below.

A hurried examination showed that Mr. West was still alive, and he was hurried to the Receiving Hospital in an ambulance, but life was extinct before he reached there.

Police officers went in search of the elevator boy, but could not locate him. No one about the building could give any information regarding him except that he had been employed in the building only a day or two.

Mr. West was 72 years of age and well known in Napa Valley. He was fairly well-to-do, being the reputed owner of several pieces of valuable land in Napa County.

The remains were removed to the Morgue, where it was found that the skull had been badly fractured and both legs broken.

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***Transcript of Coroner's Death Certificate.***

Orson Chiles West died 7 April 1901 enroute to emergency hospital. San Francisco Mortuary record gives age at death as 73 years, five months; occupation Rancher. Death was from elevator accident—dislocated neck, compound fracture of right knee etc. Burial at Laurel Hill Cemetery by Porter and White Undertakers. Recorded in Book P, Mortuary Records, City of San Francisco, 1901. Archived on microfilm at San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library, 100 Larkin Street.

Obituaries:

Orson C. West , "Fatally Mangled by an Elevator," *San Francisco Call*, 9 Apr 1901, loose clipping found in Ella Calhoun West Bible; see also *Napa Daily Journal*, 10 April 1901, 3:1 (abstract of microfilm,

Napa Public Library). Orson West death due to accidental fall down elevator shaft while visiting at Phelan Building, with son, Alfred.