

**SADDLE BROOK FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY –**  
**SADDLE BROOK HISTORICAL SOCIETY AUGUST, 2013**

**MURDER MYSTERY IN SADDLE RIVER TOWNSHIP (July 17, 1908)**  
**(PART 1)**

Mrs. Ottilie Eberhard, widow of a well-to-do Viennese merchant, who arrived in this country on Thursday to take up her residence in New York, was robbed of \$2,300 and murdered during a thunderstorm on Saturday night on the tracks of the New York, Susquehanna Western Railroad near Rochelle Park, two miles west of Hackensack, N.J.

WOMAN MURDERED, LEFT ON RAILROAD; Mrs. Ottilie Eberhard Robbed of \$2,300 and Shot Down at Lonely Spot Near Hackensack. DAUGHTER WOUNDED ALSO Went for a Trolley Ride with the Girl's Fiancé, Her Cousin, and the Police Are Looking for Him.

It was township resident and researcher, Gary Bukowski, who found the following [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com) article as it appeared on July 20, 1908. The incident took place within a few hundred feet west of the intersection of Saddle River Road and the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railroad. The details of the murder which were provided by the victim's daughter seem to leave many questions to be asked, and readers of this article are welcome to draw their own conclusions concerning what actually took place. The reprinted article is followed by clarifications and a discussion of questionable information. Agatha Christie would have loved this story!

# WOMAN MURDERED, LEFT ON RAILROAD

**Mrs. Ottilie Eberhard Robbed  
of \$2,300 and Shot Down at  
Lonely Spot Near Hackensack.**

**DAUGHTER WOUNDED ALSO**

**Went for a Trolley Ride with the Girl's  
Fiance, Her Cousin, and the Po-  
lice Are Looking for Him.**

Mrs. Ottilie Eberhard, widow of a well-to-do Viennese merchant, who arrived in this country on Thursday to take up her residence in New York, was robbed of \$2,300 and murdered during a thunderstorm on Saturday night on the tracks of the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railroad near Rochelle Park, two miles west of Hackensack, N. J.

Her body was found early yesterday on the eastbound tracks about 500 yards beyond the Rochelle Park Station. It had been ground to pieces by a passing train. Two bullet wounds were found in it.

Ottilie Eberhard, the 20-year-old daughter, who was with her mother, narrowly escaped death also, four shots having been fired at her, one passing through the rim of her straw hat, another so close to her head that it scorched her right eye, another grazing the skin on her left shoulder, clipping in twain the chain of a locket she wore around her neck, and the fourth flattening itself on one of her corset stays in the middle of her back. This bullet was found lodged in her clothing.

The police are looking for Augustus Eberhard, a nephew of the dead woman. He was engaged to the girl, and, after inducing them to go on a trolley ride with him, led them to the place where the shooting occurred.

## Section Men Find the Body.

Two members of the section crew starting on their rounds from the Rochelle Park Station early yesterday morning stumbled over the fragments of the murdered woman's body. The police of Hackensack were notified, and Chief Dunn ordered the body removed to the Ridgewood Morgue. There he and Coroner De Munda made an examination of the dead woman's clothing. It was clear that she was not a native of the neighborhood, her clothing indicating a foreigner.

It was some time before the two bullet wounds, one in the right side of her chest and the other through the upper part of her neck, were discovered, and it was decided that she had committed suicide. This seemed to be borne out by the fact that she wore a valuable gold watch on a gold chain around her neck, and in a small black handbag which was found near her body were six 100-kroner notes, about \$125. In this bag also was found a receipt for \$5 paid as first installment on the lease of a flat at 1,406 Amsterdam Avenue. This paper gave the woman's name.

An hour after the body was found, and before he had been notified of the murder, County Prosecutor Ernest Koester of Bergen County was called out of his house in Central Avenue, Hackensack, by Charles Wunder, a German, who lives at Passaic Junction, a mile and a half west of Rochelle Park. Wunder turned over to him a frightened young girl, who he said had been brought to his house late in the night by an Italian. She had spent the night there, and wanted to hunt for her mother, who she said had been struck by lightning while walking along the railroad tracks.

The girl was Miss Eberhard. She was still so dazed that she hardly realized that she had been shot herself. The Prosecutor took her into the house, and being able to speak German fluently, obtained the story from her. She neither speaks nor understands English.

Young Eberhard, she explained, had called on her and her mother late Saturday afternoon, at the hotel in New York where they went on their arrival in the city. She could not remember the name of the place, and was hazy as to its location. It was very hot, the girl said, and her mother suggested that they go up to one of the parks. Eberhard replied that it would be much better to take a trolley ride out into the country, and the set out.

### The Girl's Story.

From the girl's vague account the Prosecutor gathered that they rode uptown from some place in the lower section of Manhattan to the 130th Street Ferry. There they crossed to Edgewood and took the Hudson River Railroad trolley line out into Jersey.

When they arrived at Rochelle Park the girl said that her cousin suggested that they get out and take another trolley back to the city. It was getting late and commencing to thunder and lighten. Alighting from the car nearly a mile from the Rochelle Park station young Eberhard then led the woman and her daughter directly away from the trolley tracks toward the railroad. It was very dark, the girl said, when they got on the railroad tracks, but her cousin insisted that they were going in the right way. The three walked down between the tracks in the direction of Paterson. The girl said that as she picked her way carefully along in the lead, with her mother and the young man following, the thunder was getting heavy and the lightning blinding in its brilliancy. They soon passed all the houses and were entering a very dark strip of track, both sides of which are lined with coal pockets.

Suddenly there was a terrible crash of thunder, a vivid flash, and a scream from the woman. As the girl swung around her mother sank down on the tracks crying in German:

"I have been hit by the lightning."

The young woman ran back to her, and just as she stooped over her the four shots that grazed her head and body were fired from close behind her. She staggered to one side, dazed, and declares that her cousin grabbed her and shouted to her to run as fast as she could. Turning without a word she stumbled blindly off down the tracks. She was so frightened that she did not once look around, she said, to see if her mother and her cousin were following, and did not stop until she saw a light in the window of a small house near the tracks and fell exhausted on the doorstep.

The Italian laborer who lives in the house, which is a mile from the place where Mrs. Eberhard's body was found, revived the girl with the assistance of his wife, and seeing that she was a German girl he took her to Wunder's house, which is near by. The latter was able to make little out of her story, and his wife put her to bed.

### Did Not Suspect Her Cousin.

The girl could give no explanation of the tragedy when she was told that her mother had been shot, but insisted that her cousin could not be suspected. At the same time she denied seeing any one else on the tracks and could not explain the shots. She insisted that she knew nothing of what had passed behind her until she heard her mother scream and turned around to see her sink down on the tracks. She said that the shots must have been fired from behind. She could not see where her cousin stood in the dark until he seized her and told her to run. She was sure, however, that her mother had fallen on the westbound tracks, while the body was found on the eastbound, where it had evidently been dragged after the girl ran off down the tracks.

When asked how much money her mother had in her bag the girl replied that she did not know exactly, but that it was nearly \$2,500, all in American bills of large denomination except the six 100-kronen notes. The girl persisted in denying that her cousin had done the shooting, despite the fact that she admitted to Chief Dunn that she knew young Eberhard had a thirty-two-calibre revolver with six chambers in his pocket when they started on their trolley ride. While he was sitting in their rooms at the hotel before they left he took off his coat on account of the heat, and the girl had noticed the revolver in his hip pocket. When she spoke to him about the weapon he showed it to her and said he always carried it with him.

CARRIED IT WITH HIM.

After telling her story the girl was taken over to Ridgewood, where she identified her mother's body. Her composure throughout was remarkable, and after being taken back to the Prosecutor's house she ate a hearty luncheon with him and his family. Mr. Koester afterward made a further effort to find out from her the name and location of the hotel in New York where she and her mother had been staying. All she could say was that when her cousin met them at the dock he took them across the river on a ferryboat and to a small hotel "half way between the river and the elevated railroad."

#### Arrived on the Deutschland.

They arrived here Thursday on the Deutschland of the Hamburg-American Line, on which their baggage still remained, with the trunk in which the girl's wedding outfit and the gown in which she was to be married to young Eberhard are packed. Then the girl recalled that a young man they met on the boat could probably tell the name of the hotel. His name was Ernest Held, she said. She met him on the voyage and invited him to call on her when she left the boat, giving him the address of the hotel to which she and her mother were going. She had expected him to call yesterday afternoon, she said.

The Prosecutor, Chief Dunn, County Detective Blauvelt, the girl, and several newspaper men then set out for Hoboken. W. Jurss, Assistant Chief Steward of the Deutschland, who has charge of the second cabin, remembered the girl and her mother well. He said that Held was a handsome young German who played in the ship's band and acted as deck steward. He had noticed the friendship between the girl and the young man during the trip. Chief Dunn enlisted the assistance of Sergt. Fallon of the Hoboken police, and with the girl in charge set out to find the young German along the water front. He was soon found at the Amsterdam Hotel in River Street, where he had an engagement to play in the orchestra in the Summer garden later in the afternoon. After greeting the girl warmly, expressing his astonishment at the tragedy, and posing for the newspaper photographers, he accompanied the officers back to the ship and got the address of the girl's hotel. It proved to be the Adelphi, at Tenth Avenue and Twenty-third Street.

There the girl was allowed to go upstairs and change her clothes. The hotel proprietor gave a good description of young Eberhard. He is of medium height, stout, of dark complexion, smooth shaven, and about 26 years old. On his several visits to the house, about twice a day since Thursday, he wore a gray suit of clothes and a soft-brimmed straw hat.

The girl was then taken back to Hackensack and lodged at the home of one of the county detectives, where she will be kept until after the inquest. During the entire day she displayed the greatest composure, not once showing any signs of breaking down. She appeared to have little concern over her mother's tragic death.

#### Woman a Native of St. Louis.

Mrs. Eberhard, it was learned from the girl, was born of German parents in St. Louis forty-eight years ago, but returned to Germany in her youth and married a prosperous merchant. He died twenty years ago, soon after the girl's birth, leaving his wife and only child a competence. The girl knew nothing of her mother's people in St. Louis.

Five years ago young Eberhard, who had grown up with the girl, came to this country with his father and mother and two brothers. It had been understood that they were to marry some day, and in the last few months they received frequent letters from him urging them to come over to New York. Finally they decided to do this, and after turning most of their effects into cash, amounting to \$2,500, set sail. Soon after their arrival the little flat in Amsterdam Avenue was rented, and, although the girl admitted that the young man had not talked much of the marriage since their arrival, she and her mother understood that it was to take place very soon.

Eberhard, the girl said, is employed by Frederick Wehmann, a grocer at 152d Street and St. Nicholas Place, and lives with him and his family over the store. One of his brothers is in this city, where she does not know; the other is in the West, and the parents live somewhere in Dutchess County.

When Wehmann was seen he said the young man gave up his room with them a week ago on account of his daughter coming home to live, and Wehmann could not tell where he went.

"Young Eberhard came to work for me several months ago," said he. "He was a good, steady boy, and I liked him. I cannot imagine his being mixed up in anything like this."

The young man's brother, Wehmann said, works in a butcher's shop in 125th Street.

#### Looking for Eberhard's Friends.

The grocer furnished one piece of information which is considered important by the detectives working on the case and led them to make a careful canvass of the neighborhood where the tragedy occurred for any acquaintances of young Eberhard. He said that the young man got a few hours off on Saturday morning, saying that he was going over to Jersey to see some friends.

W. H. Ackerman, who lives not far from the scene of the tragedy, reported to the detectives that he heard six shots near the coal pockets about 8:30 in the evening. He took his shotgun and went out to investigate. Seeing nothing wrong he went back home and retired.

The station agent at Rochelle Park saw the two women and the man pass, but paid no further attention to them.

John Platt, another resident of the neighborhood, heard the shots and thought they came from the rear of his barn. He also went out to investigate, but found nothing wrong and went back indoors. Yesterday he recalled seeing two strange men, who, he said, were apparently Germans, loitering about the coal pockets late Saturday afternoon. They were in their shirt sleeves, but he was sure they did not live in the vicinity.

Abraham Haslup was sitting on the stoop of his house near the Park station when he saw in the dark what he took for two men and a woman turn onto the tracks and walk toward the junction. He said they seemed to be having a heated argument. A few minutes later he heard the shots, and went out to investigate, but returned after waiting and listening near the house a few minutes.

#### SOME COMMENT AND QUESTIONS

- Just as a matter of history readers might be interested in knowing that the Hudson River and Ferry Trolley went from Paterson to Edgewater and then down the Palisades to the 125th Street Ferry to New York. In 1902, the company built Palisades Park as a means of increasing ridership on the Trolley. The Trolley traveled from Paterson (on Broadway) to Plaza Road in Fair Lawn along the present day border between Fair Lawn and Saddle Brook. One of its concrete supports can be seen in the northeast section of Otto C. Pehle Park. More detailed information may be found in *Saddle Brook: A Portrait of Our Past*, available at town hall and Kim Bridge Cardtiques and Florist, 449 Market Street, Saddle Brook, NJ.
- The Coal Pockets were huge piles of coal that supplied the Susquehanna steam engines. They began on the northwest side of what is now the Saddle River Road ramp to Route 80.
- The section of our township where the murder took place was often referred to as Rochelle Park. It took place in Saddle River Township, now Saddle Brook.
- Considering that they were on a trolley ride out in the country, why were they so far from the trolley at night in the midst of a storm?
- Mrs. Eberhard was shot accurately with two bullets. Her daughter was grazed by three bullets. The fourth bullet was lodged in a corset stay made of metal or bone. Pretty sloppy shooting! Also, did she make no connection with the pistol which she had previously seen in her cousin's coat pocket? How did she know it was a 32 caliber pistol? Did she question why he "always carried it with him?"
- The daughter didn't know the name of her hotel but was able to provide directions to Ernst Held's hotel.

- The Ship's Chief Assistant steward remembered that Held "was a handsome young German who played in the ship's band." He noticed the friendship between the girl and the young man during the trip.
- As reported, on two occasions she exhibited "great composure" and no signs of "breaking down." Should she have been more concerned about her mother's death?
- Augustus Eberhard worked for a grocer, Frederick Wehmann, and "lived with him and his family over the store." Evidently, he was by no means prosperous and would be considered a poor marital "catch" for a Viennese girl from a wealthy family. Also according to Wehmann, he had left a week before "on account of his daughter coming home to live."
- John Platt, whose residence and farm were located south of the railroad, reported seeing two strange men, Germans, "loitering" around the coal pockets on Saturday afternoon. Could this have been Augustus and Ernest?
- Abraham Hascup who resided north of the Coal Pockets reported seeing two men and a woman near the Coal Pockets on the night of the murder (July 17). They seemed to be having a "heated argument." This was before he heard the shots. Were the two men Augustus and Ernest?
- As a matter of clarification, the Passaic Junction noted was not in Passaic; it was located in the northeast corner of the intersection of the Susquehanna Railroad and Midland Avenue at the end of Dewey Street near the Passaic Junction Cemetery.

We have tried to unearth more information but were only able to retrieve the ship's passenger list. Records of the trial might be on file at the Bergen County Court House in Hackensack. In a postscript, Mr. Bukowski has noted that Eberhard was found guilty of murder and sentenced to thirty years of incarceration. He believes that Eberhard was released in early 1920's. Anyone is welcome to continue investigating this story. What is your theory of the murders? More information should be forthcoming and will be presented by Joe Obiso and our township website as Murder Mystery in Saddle River Township (Part Two)

[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

Jack Wasdyke: Township Historian