

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Caseus Wheeler

1847–1911

St. John The Evangelist cemetery, Barrytown

*Granit tablet with rough sides, base, and slanted top
FLT and Oddfellows three chain links motif. Next to a
cedar tree, north west side of the cemetery.*

Like many of his neighbors in life and interred in this cemetery, Barrytown resident Caseus Wheeler was a New York Central railroad man. Listed at various times as a gateman, flagman, or towerman, he held a position in which he was responsible for directing both trains and traffic that crossed train tracks. And like many of his neighbors employed in this dangerous industry, Caseus was hurt on the job.

On the 25th of September, 1902 when he was 45 years old, he and coworker Bert Grube were travelling south, about a mile and a half between Caseus' post at tower number 72 and Barrytown, on a contraption not seen today—perhaps for good reason. The two men were riding a railroad velocipede, a sort of rail-riding bicycle with an arm that stretched across the tracks to stabilize it. Made of wood and iron, the railroad velocipede was a strange device. Imagine a hand cart (like the one in the beginning of the movie *Blazing Saddles*) except with two inline train wheels, two seats, and rather than pumping up and down, the handle is moved back and forth by the man in front.

The journey was one these men made often, but, on this particular Thursday evening, they were “caught in a cut by two trains”. If you’ve ever seen the rock cut at Barrytown where the tracks go through, you can imagine how harrowing this must have been with one train barrelling down on you, let alone a train on each of the two tracks at the same time. Bert was able to jump clear of a fast-moving passenger train, but Caseus wasn’t so lucky. They must have been hit from behind as the velocipede was smashed to pieces, throwing Caseus forward where he landed on the ties with his head toward the oncoming train. It quickly passed over and when it cleared him he’d been flipped at least once and was now lying in the opposite direction.

Miraculously, Caseus survived the ordeal with severe injuries including a broken ankle and wrist. He spent the next five months at Vassar Hospital and was back to work in May of 1903.

Caseus Wheeler, a son of William H. and Catherine Wheeler of Red Hook, married Jane Sheppard, a native of England, and had six children, five of which lived to adulthood: Alice who married John J. Heth-



erington, Kate who married Willet Harris, William C. who married Della Sherman, Blanche who married George Winteren, and Emma May Wheeler who married Edward Kaiser. All but Kate moved away from the area.

The notice of his death said that he had been a member of Fallkill Lodge No. 297 I.O.O.F (the Odd-fellows) since 1872. He was 64 years old. Caseus and Jane share their tombstone with William M. Payne who appears to have also been from England. There may be a link between him and the Sheppard family but as of this writing it is unknown what that may be.



[This is not a photo of Caseus and Bert, it's titled "1900s Southern Pacific Co Railway Velocipede Inspection Car" from The Online Bicycle Museum website onlinebicyclemuseum.co.uk/1900s-southern-pacific-co-railway-velocipede-inspection-car/]

Researched and written by Sarah K. Hermans, 2025

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