

Austin Corbin's Obituary originally printed in the New Hampshire Argus and Spectator in the Friday, June 12, 1896 Newspaper has been reprinted a number of times in various local publications. The account of Corbin's accident is magnificently detailed by onlookers in the Obituary. Beyond the details of the accident the article shares an extensive history of Austin Corbin and many of his business dealings and entrepreneurial activities as well.

Evan Hill's *Historical Chronology of Newport: 1724—2007*. Reprinted this original article with some editor notes adding some context over a hundred years later.

Images from the Newport Historical Society have been included in this article.

## ***1896 -- Austin Corbin Dies 4 June.***

# **AUSTIN CORBIN KILLED!**

*in a Terrible Accident*

-

*Also, Coachman John Stokes  
Corbin Edgell's Leg Broken*

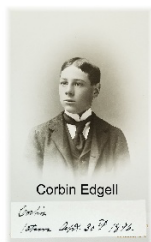
-

*Dr. Paul Kunzer Badly Injured*

-

*Mr. Corbin's Brilliant Career*

The sad and tragic event with which the community was shocked on Thursday afternoon of last week, and which resulted in the death of Austin Corbin and his coachman, John Stokes, and the serious injury of his grandson, Corbin Edgell, and the boy's tutor, Dr. Paul Kunzer, cast a shadow over the community which deepens and darkens as the days pass by. The awful calamity could not be taken in at once by the community, and even now after the lapse of a week, it can hardly be comprehended in all its fullness.



How much was crowded into that fatal afternoon in connection with that one family! The planning of a pleasure trip by its honored head, the preparing of the team, its appearance at the place of departure in charge of the faithful coachman, the good-byes

spoken, the start, the fright of the horses, their rapid plunging down the driveway, the upsetting of the carriage, the groans of the dying -- and finally, the deathbed scenes -- one about as the shades of evening began to gather and the other a little later -- when the stars in silent sadness, were gazing down upon the house of sorrow.

The Corbin homestead in this town, embracing every convenience and arrangement for enjoyment and comfort that wealth can give, is situated about two miles and a half from this village in a north-westerly course. The mansion is located a short distance north of the main road, which runs east and west. From it two driveways converge -- one leading to the main road in a south-easterly direction, and the other leading to it in a south-westerly direction.



A week ago last Saturday, May 30, Mr. and Mrs. Corbin and their youngest daughter Miss Anna Corbin, came to the farm in their private car to enjoy a season of rest and recreation. On the day of the fatal accident a drive to Governor's Pond, situated in the park at the southern extremity of Croydon mountain, had been planned by Mr. Corbin for the purpose of fishing. The party, which included only the four individuals before mentioned, started with a span of horses and a two-seated open carriage on the driveway leading south-westerly to the main road. About as soon as the start was made the horses which had been harnessed for the first time without blinders, became frightened and ran rapidly down the driveway. They acquired speed and momentum in their flight, and when at a point where the roads intersect the carriage was upset and the occupants thrown out with great force. As the accident was seen from the house it appeared as if the victims were sent many feet into the air. Mr. Corbin was thrown against the stone wall on the south side of the highway, young Corbin Edgell was thrown about the same distance and also came in contact with the wall. Dr. Kunzer was sent over the wall into the field, and Mr. Stokes was partially wound around a tree near the wall.



Mrs. Corbin and other members of the family witnessed the frightful scene from the veranda, and at once telephoned for assistance. Dr. J. Leavitt Cain arrived in nine minutes after receiving the dispatch, and Dr. Stickney a little later. Drs. Tolles and Upham, of Claremont, came on the 4 o'clock train, and Dr. O. G. Cilley, of Boston, accompanied by A. N. Parlin, Jr., an intimate friend of Mr. Corbin, arrived by special train at 8:30.

On the arrival of Dr. Cain preparations were at once begun for taking the injured to the house and this was soon accomplished by the use of mattresses. The wounds were attended to as far as possible. Mr. Corbin's injuries were found to be of a most serious nature. The right leg was badly broken in several places, the bones projecting a number of inches, a scalp wound three or four inches in length was found on the forehead, another incision of about the same size on the right side of the face in front of the ear, while the lips and chin were badly cut, bruised and distorted. The coachman's right leg was frightfully fractured and mangled, and there were two fractures on the skull -- one on the right temple and other at the base of the brain, either of which would have caused death. Corbin Edgell sustained a compound fracture of the right leg, and Dr. Kunzer a fracture of his right wrist. The two latter, after the fractures were adjusted, were removed to the Edgell residence on the Croydon Road. Mr. Stokes died at about 6 o'clock, having been unconscious from the time he was thrown from the carriage.

Mr. Corbin died at 9:45 o'clock. He may have been partially conscious for a few minutes after he was injured, but if so he soon lost consciousness and did not regain it. Mrs. Corbin and the two daughters, Mrs. Edgell and Miss Annie Corbin, and several attendants were constantly at his bedside until he breathed his last. Dr. Cilley, of Boston, and the local physicians were also present and closely followed every symptom of the dying man.

The son, Austin Corbin, Jr., was in Boston at the time of this accident and came to town that evening by special train. He did not arrive, however, until about three-quarters of an hour after the death of his father. George B. Edgell, Mr. Corbin's son-in-law, was in Arkansas and was not able to reach New York until Monday. The horses with which Mr. Corbin set out on his fatal drive were recently purchased by him of one of our livery stable keepers who bought them in Lebanon a short time since. They were a handsome

seal-brown span, and Mr. Corbin was proud of them. At about the time they began to ..... Mr. Corbin raised a ... umbrella, and this may have been the cause of their fright as they had always been accustomed to blinders; but of course, this is mere conjecture, and cannot be stated with any certainty.

Brief Episcopal services were held at the Corbin mansion at 10 o'clock, a.m., Saturday, and were conducted by Rev. W. B. T. Smith of Charlestown. The director was David A. Newton, who performed all the duties appertaining to the position. (Father of Dixi Newtown?) The casket, in which were the remains of Mr. Corbin, was of Spanish cedar; its covering was of broadcloth and its trimmings silver. The inscription was as follows: "Austin Corbin: 1827-1896." The services were private, and were attended by the following persons outside of the immediate family circle: William Dunton, Edmund Wheeler, Albert S. Wait, Abiathar Richards, Seth M. Richards, Mrs. Dexter Richards of Newport, Miss Alice Wheeler and Mrs. Wm. P. Wheeler of Keene and A. N. Parlin, Jr. of Boston.

The remains were taken to New York in Mr. Corbin's private car Saturday afternoon, just a week after his arrival in Newport, and were accompanied by Mrs. Corbin, Austin Corbin, Jr., Miss Annie Corbin and Mr. Parlin, Mrs. Edgell going Monday noon. The remains of Mr. Stokes, accompanied by Mrs. Stokes, who arrived in town the day following the death of her husband were also taken to New York on the same train.



The funeral services in New York were held in St. Bartholomew's church, Forty fourth street and Madison Avenue, Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock, and were conducted by Bishop Williams, assisted by the Rev. Dr. Huntington and the Rev. Dr. Booth,

assistant rector of the church referred to above. They were attended by twenty or upwards of the directors of the different railroad enterprises with which Mr. Corbin was connected and one hundred of the employees of the Long Island Railroad Company were present in a body. The pall bearers were Cornelius Vanderbilt, Gen. B. F. Tracy, Senator William E. Chandler, Sir Roderick Cameron, C. M. Pratt, J. Rogers Maxwell, J. G. K. Duer, Dumont Clark, A. N. Parlin, and William B. Kendall. The remains were taken to Woodlawn in Mr. Corbin's private car and the interment was made in the family vault.

Mr. Corbin was a remarkable man. As a financier he had few equals in the country and perhaps no superior. His strong mind and unerring judgment, coupled with great executive ability and a clear understanding of human nature, enabled him to grapple successfully with any enterprise which he took up in earnest and to crown his life-work with a success that but a few men ever attain.

He was born in this town on the very place where his life so tragically ended, July 11, 1817, [NOTE: both Wheeler and Parmalee give his birth date as July 11, 1827] and was therefore nearly 60 (this is an error, nearly 70 is correct) years of age. He was well educated, though not a college graduate. He turned his attention to the law, pursued his studies with the late Chief Justice (of N.H. court), Edmund L. Cushing and the late Gov. Ralph Metcalf, and completed them at the Harvard Law School, from which he graduated in 1849. He practiced with much success in Newport two years and then, his ambitions lead him to seek a wider field. In the fall of 1851 he located in Davenport, Iowa, where his reputation as a lawyer was soon established. He practiced first alone, and then as head of a firm which he formed, and which, it is said, had a more extensive and lucrative practice than any other law firm in his adopted State. But there came a time, his success in the profession of the law notwithstanding, when he was ambitious to explore other fields of labor. Accordingly in 1854 he launched into the banking business, and was engaged in it in Iowa most of the time, and with remarkable success, until 1865, when he removed to New York and formed the Corbin Banking Company. This company has always been pre-eminently successful, and today one of the best known institutions of its kind in the country. He has been at the same time connected with many other banking institutions, and the story of one is the story of all where he has had a controlling influence.

But the business of banking alone seemed not to afford sufficient scope to satisfy his ambition. He sought other worlds to conquer. Among his great enterprises has been that on Manhattan Beach. He had occasion to visit Coney Island in the interest of a child in feeble health in 1873, and his keen intellect at once saw a fortune in the locality. For generations the conditions had existed just as at that time, but it remained for Mr. Corbin to see them as they were and turn them to practical account. This conversion of the island from a barren waste into one of the finest seaside resorts in the world was accomplished in a few years, and the enterprise while bringing large sums of money to Mr. Corbin's coffers, has been a great blessing to the people of New York, Brooklyn, Jersey City, and other places more remote.

## Oriental Hotel - Coney Island



He next became engaged in vast railroad enterprises, the scope and success of which have been marvelous. His railroad enterprises on Long Island, his work accomplished as president of the great Reading and Pennsylvania railroad, and his other enterprises of this character are so well known that we need not recount them here.

The same may be said regarding his enterprises in this vicinity. His purchasing of the old homestead in this town, where his parents lived many years, and where he spent the days of his youth, the additional purchase of many neighboring farms, the extensive improvements thereon, the purchase of Croydon mountain and surrounding territory, its transformation into a park containing twenty-five thousand acres and stocked with buffalo, deer, elk, wild boar, and other specimens of the animal kingdom, are facts so well known to the general public as not to require recital in this article.

But after the accomplishment of all which we have mentioned and much more to which we have not the space to refer, his mind, fertile in the conception of enterprises and many great schemes which he hoped to carry out, were not begun at the time of his death. Conspicuous among these was that of crossing the Atlantic in four days by means of a line of steamships running between Montauk Point, Long Island and Milford Haven, England. Another favorite scheme was that of uniting Long Island and New Jersey by a tunnel. Extending under the North and East rivers, it was to connect the Pennsylvania depot with the Long Island Railroad terminus at Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn. Some of these proposed enterprises may, and doubtless will, be carried out by living participants in the world's progress, but they will not have the assistance of the departed save in the spirit and influence which he left behind.

We are unable to make any accurate statement with regard to the amount which Mr. Corbin was worth, but there is no room to doubt that he was a multimillionaire and worth many millions.

Mr. Corbin, who was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Austin Corbin, well known and highly honored residents of Newport, had brothers and sisters as follows: Lois, now dead, who was born in 1819 and married William Dunton; Mary Ann who was born in 1829 and died in 1847; Daniel C. who was born in 1832 - a very successful man; Sarah Emily, born in 1835, married True W. Childs, a Toledo, O. merchant; James, born in 1838 and a

successful lawyer. --- (see Wheeler p. 351 and 188) ----

Mr. Corbin was united in marriage August 16, 1853 with Hannah M., daughter of Simeon and Hannah (Haven) Wheeler and grand-daughter of the late Rev. Jacob Haven of Croydon who has ever been a worthy consort of her lamented husband. Their children have been Mary, now dead, who was born in 1855, and married Rene Cheronnet Champollion of France; Isabel, who was born in 1858 and married S. Edgell, a noted business man; William, who died young; Annie, born in 1863; and Austin Corbin, Jr. born in 1872.

It was in his family circle where Mr. Corbin's happy, sunny, and kind disposition, and the excellent characteristics of the man were displayed to the best advantage and neither the affluence and luxury with which the bereaved are surrounded, nor the sympathy and consolation of friends can bind up the severed ties of the mourning household or assuage the grief produced on that fatal day.

----- then follows a poem written for Mr. C.'s death, and a reprint of a story from "Friday's Brooklyn Eagle." -----

In the Eagle story Henry W. Maxwell "who was vice-president of the Long Island railroad when Mr. Corbin was president" is quoted "... he was the liveliest man I ever saw.....The firm of Maxwell and Graves became associated with him in the purchase of the Long Island railroad in 1881..... most indefatigable worker and the most buoyant type of a man. He had profound faith in New York ..... and too, great confidence in the West, but he concluded that genius and hard work had a very good chance in developments about the metropolis.....He invested his money and gave all of his thought, time and strength to the development of the Long Island road without compensation or salary, feeling that in the growth of the road his compensation would come with that of the other stockholders. I regard...his conception and development of Manhattan Beach as one of the greatest of his achievements. He made it the great, clean playground for the people, and it is a worthy monument to his life. Had he done nothing more than to create this from the sand hills he found there his life would not have been lived in vain."

----

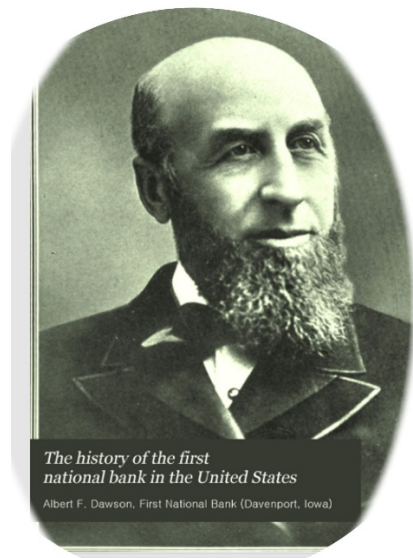
#### **From page 188 of Wheeler's History of Newport:**

AUSTIN CORBIN, son of Hon. Austin Corbin, was born July 11, 1827. He was well educated, and at the age of nineteen commenced the study of the law, pursuing the same with Hon. Edmund L. Cushing, of Charlestown, since chief-justice of New Hampshire, and later with Hon. Ralph Metcalf, afterwards governor of the state. His legal education was completed at the Harvard Law School, where he received his degree in 1849. In that year he was admitted to the bar, and at once began practice as the partner of his former teacher, Mr. Metcalf. He practiced for two years, and with great success, but, desiring a wider field, determined to remove to the West, which he did in the fall of 1851, locating himself at Davenport, Iowa.

In Davenport he resided until 1865. During all this time he was engaged in the practice of his profession, -- first, alone, then as the senior partner of the firm of Corbin

and Dow, and afterwards of Corbin, Dow and Brown. These firms took high rank in the state; and for some years no law firm in Iowa had a more extensive or more successful practice. During the later years, however, Mr. Corbin had very little to do in the active practice of his profession. In 1854 he became interested in banking, as the partner of Mr. Louis A. Macklot, under the firm name of Macklot and Corbin; and from that time on he occupied a very prominent position in the state in that business. In 1857 there were seven banks and banking-houses in the city; and in the severe times that followed the financial troubles of that year, every one suspended except that of Macklot & Corbin. That house met all demands promptly, and paid depositors in full.

In 1861 Mr. Corbin sold his interest in the house to his partner, and retired from the business; but in 1863, immediately upon the passage of the national currency act, he organized the First National Bank of Davenport, became its president, and commenced business of the 29th day of June 1863, which was two days in advance of any national bank in the United States. The result of the organization of this bank was also most successful. In June, 1865, after the bank had been in business two years, and had paid dividends of 15 per cent. per annum, its stock was worth \$250 on the books, and very soon thereafter sold for \$300.



This year Mr. Corbin sold out all his stock and nearly all the property he had in that county, and removed to New York, where he established himself in the banking business, and where he has since been. His first partner in New York was Mr. Gilman S. Moulton. He retired in 1870; and then Mr. Corbin organized "The Corbin Banking Company." This is a private company, under the laws of New York, issuing no notes, but with stock, as in other banks, except that all shareholders are individually liable to the extent of their entire estates for the debts of the company. Connected with him are several prominent capitalists; and the company stands high, as well in New York as in the West, where they do a very large business. A large part of this is the lending of money upon farms; and they are reported to have on their books collections of this character amounting to over \$15,000,000. In this special class of investments, they have larger

dealings that any other firm in the world.



Mr. Corbin is also largely interested in stock companies for the investment of capital, outside of his own, -- "The New England Loan Company" at Manchester, N.H., and the "New England Mortgage Security Company," at Boston. He has also large holdings of stock in the "American Mortgage Company of Scotland," at Edinburgh, the Corbin Banking Company being its American correspondents.

But probably no undertaking of his life has met with such immediate and signal success as the organization of the Manhattan Beach enterprise near New York city. In 1873 he was compelled under the advice of his physician, to go at once, with his sick child, to the seashore; and taking the nearest one at hand, went to Coney Island. Here the family remained most of the summer, and during his sojourn he was astonished to find, within an hour of New York city, the finest sea-beach on the Atlantic coast. But its proximity to the great city had made it largely the resort of the worst portions of society; and, so far as its front was occupied, it was constructed of poor buildings.



A portion -- nearly half the island, and the best part -- was wholly unoccupied, the titles being in very great disorder. This portion Mr. Corbin determined to secure, redeem from its bad reputation, and build up and preserve for the better classes of New York. After three years of work, and at great expense, he acquired all the titles, and had under his control an ocean front of 2 and one-half miles, and a territory of over 500 acres, extending from ocean to bay. He then organized a railroad company, to which the whole was conveyed; and in 1877, on the 19th day of July, it was opened to the public. On the ocean a magnificent hotel -- the finest seaside hotel in America -- had been erected; extensive bathing-houses had been built; and the Railway hotel and grounds were crowded with guests the balance of the season. During the years 1877 and 1878, the railway carried over 1,600,000 people. It has been already a very great, and is destined in the future to be a much greater, blessing to the citizens of New York. Its hotel, its bathing facilities, and its police system, are unequalled in any city on this continent. Mr. Corbin has received from every source, public and private, high praise for the conception of this grand idea, and the grand manner in which it has been carried out. [See Wheeler Genealogy.] -0-



**1896** -- The will of the late Austin Corbin has been filed and his estate is estimated at

\$40,000,000. -Argus and Spec. 17 July 1896.