



# Downingtown Area Historical Society *History Notes*

Interesting bits of Downingtown area history

January 9, 2020

Volume 3, Issue 1

## Who Tried to Kill Frances Broadhead?

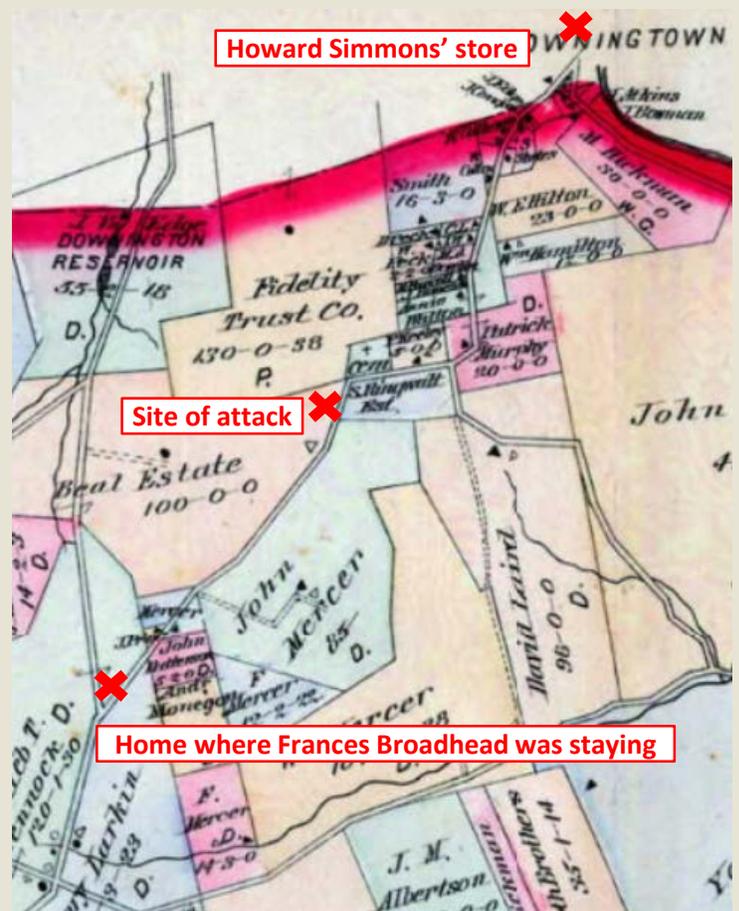
A few minutes past 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, July 12, 1894, Frances Broadhead left the store of Howard Simmons at the corner of Bradford Avenue and Church Street in the Johnsontown section of Downingtown and began the two-mile trek to the home she was staying at in West Bradford Township. Alone and with an armful of groceries, Broadhead walked south on Bradford Avenue then turned right and began the long trudge up Glenside Avenue to the home of Ida Brown, her widowed sister with whom she had been living for several months.

At the time, Glenside was a simple dirt road that connected West Bradford Township to the west side of Downingtown. As Broadhead made her way up Glenside, she passed perhaps twenty or so small homes, but as the road began to level off, homes were more spread out and the area more isolated. It was in this isolated section just past St. Joseph's Cemetery that someone took the opportunity to try to take her life.

The assailant was hidden in the underbrush along the right side of Glenside and waited for her to pass by. When she was at nearly point-blank range the attacker raised a pistol and pulled the trigger. The bullet pierced a bag of corn meal she was carrying but fortunately did not injure her. The frightened Broadhead screamed, dropped her groceries, and ran. A second shot rang out and this time she was hit, the bullet grazing her right arm. The shots were so close that there were powder burns on her dress.

Despite being hit the second time Broadhead kept running, setting her sights on the home of her nearest neighbor Mary Pryor. She reached Pryor's overwhelmed with fright and totally exhausted, but realizing she wasn't being followed, decided to continue to her sister's home and safety. Except for the two pistol shots, Frances Broadhead didn't hear anything, and she never saw her attacker. Word eventually reached Downingtown, but no attempt was made to locate the assailant given the amount of time that had passed.

*The map at the right shows the northeast section of West Bradford Township.*



(continued on next page)

Frances Broadhead, formerly Cain, was born in 1866 at Dowlin Forge a short distance north of Downingtown but lived most of her early life in the Borough. In August 1893 she married Joseph Broadhead and they lived in West Manayunk where Joseph's family was from. The marriage started out well, but after four months Joseph deserted Frances. She had him arrested for desertion and on March 10, 1894 Joseph began a three-month sentence in a Norristown jail. At this time Frances went to live with her sister Ida Brown near Downingtown.

Around May 1, Joseph's sister Annie Broadhead wrote a letter to Frances telling her that her brother was "wasting away" in jail and would continue to decline if not released. Frances traveled to Norristown and secured his release but not until she received a promise from him that he would be a better husband. The promise was never carried out and the relationship continued to worsen. But on July 3, Frances received a letter from Joseph asking her to meet him in Manayunk the morning of the Fourth of July. Still holding out hope for reconciliation, Frances went but Joseph never showed up. She returned to her sister's home. On July 12 she walked from her sister's home in West Bradford to Downingtown to do some shopping and to go to the Post Office in the hopes of getting a letter from her husband. She was almost killed that afternoon. Frances Broadhead was adamant that she never felt threatened by her husband. The crime was never solved.

At the time of the shooting Frances was five months pregnant. She gave birth to a son, Harry, the following November. It appears the couple never got back together. Several years later Frances married Thomas Baldwin of Downingtown. On the marriage application it states that she was married before but the "marriage was dissolved by death." However, this is not true. Joseph Broadhead died in 1931.

If we come upon more information about this bizarre crime, we will include it in a future issue of History Notes.

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## Downingtown Area From Above

The photo below was taken in 1970 and shows a portion of the northwest section of Downingtown.



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## In The (Old) News – Items that Made Headlines Back in the Day

**1915** – In July, Downingtown police were on the lookout for a man who cut off the braids of Sarah Zinn, age 14, on a crowded street in town.

**1936** – Perhaps because he was blind in one eye and deaf in one ear, Downingtown coal dealer Joe Mendenhall never saw the train. The train didn't hit him, but he hit the train with his coal truck at a crossing in northern Chester County. The crash resulted in a derailed Reading Railroad box car and hundreds of torn up railroad ties on the Reading's line. The railroad sued Mendenhall in Chester County Court for the damages and was awarded \$1,849 which the coal dealer was required to pay.

**1946** – On May 14, Downingtown High School pitcher Ray Barrow threw his second perfect game in five days with a 3-0 win over Pottstown. The previous week Barrow threw a perfect game against Coatesville with a 3-0 win.

**1964** – In late July, thieves broke into Lena's Steak Shop at 149 East Lancaster Avenue. Unable to find anything of value, they went up the stairs and broke into the living quarters of Joseph and Mary Mfauewd who were away on vacation in their home country of Lebanon. The Mfauewds operated a shoe repair business next door at 147 East Lancaster Avenue for the past 45 years. The intruders tore apart the second-floor apartment attempting to locate money which they did not find. Police were working with Mfauewd's sister on the case as they did not want to contact Mfauewd and "ruin his vacation."

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## Downingtown Area Group Photo

The image below was taken on the playground of Downingtown's East Ward School during a hot July day in 1965. Leader Darlene McGuire watches over (L to R): Diane DiMartin, Donna Katherina, Gregory Valente, David DiPietro, and Terri Sheeler.



## Downingtown Vintage Ad

This advertisement for Dolly's Luncheonette appeared in the January 9, 1964 issue of the Downingtown Archive. Dolly's was located at 136 West Lancaster Avenue which is the first building to the west of Turkey Hill.

It is interesting to note that you had to bring your own container for take-out spaghetti!

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**DOLLY'S LUNCHEONETTE**

136 W. Lancaster — Downingtown

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**Open 6:00 a.m. For Breakfast**

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**Hot Lunch Specials Every Day**

*including*

Thurs. Spaghetti, R&B, Coffee ..	\$1.00
1/2 Fried Chicken-in-Basket .....	\$1.15
Veal Scallopini Sandwich .....	.50
Meat Ball Sandwich .....	.50
Ham Hoagies .....	.60

**Take Out Orders. Bring own Containers For Spaghetti.**

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## Filching Farrar's Foxes

On February 18, 1914, two foxes belonging to a man named Farrar were stolen from his kennel near Downingtown by breaking a lock off the door. Farrar had an idea of where the foxes might be and proceeded to the home of Howard Durborrow near Parkesburg. On the way he alerted Coatesville's Chief of Police Charles Umsted, who accompanied him, and the pair found the foxes in Durborrow's barn.

Durborrow claimed he purchased the foxes from two men and that they were rightfully his. Farrar, however, claimed they were stolen, and though he lacked official proof of ownership, could show they were his if the female fox recognized him. When Farrar entered the stall the female fox barked and ran into his arms. Neither Durborrow nor Umstead could get anywhere near her. Farrar got his foxes back.

Two men, John Worth and Horace Carson, were arrested for the thefts. The men pleaded not guilty and when the time came for a trial, would claim they could prove their innocence. It is not known what the result of the trial was.



## Last Issue's Mystery Pic

**Paul Backenstose** is a truly perceptive scholar because he was the first person to identify the building in last week's Mystery Pic (right) as the old Railway Express Agency (REA) building. The building stood for many years on the north side of the railroad tracks (as seen in the images below) but when the REA no longer served Downingtown the building was sold to the local Optimists club. It was moved to Kerr Park by the Lancaster Avenue Bridge in 1961 (right, the bridge can be seen to the right of the building) where it stood for about a year. It was given to the Boy Scouts and moved again to another spot in Kerr Park by the parking lot and baseball diamond. The Scouts used it to store newspapers during their paper drives. The building fell into disrepair and was eventually torn down.



# Downingtown Then & Now

A recent Downingtown Then & Now compares an image taken of the old Grange National Bank building on East Lancaster Avenue in the 1950s or 1960s with one taken recently from the same location. The building was constructed in 1907 and sold in 1932 when the bank merged with Downingtown National Bank. It was purchased by the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) who used the second floor as a meeting space but rented the first floor and basement levels. A State Liquor Store occupied the first floor for many years. The old bank building was torn down in the 1970s. Our "Then & Now" videos can be seen on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).



## Downingtown Did-You-Know

Did you know that the Log House in the center of Downingtown was once the home of the Downingtown Chamber of Commerce? The Borough of Downingtown took possession of the property in the 1940s after the last resident moved out. The Chamber occupied the Log House from around 1950 to the mid-1980s.

### DOWNINGTOWN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

*In the Heart of  
Chester County*



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OFFICE

THE LOG CABIN  
Built In 1710

PHONE 269-1523

East Lancaster Avenue  
DOWNINGTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

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## Downingtown Area Mystery Pic

Can you identify the location in this photograph? The first person to correctly identify the location of this photo will be recognized as a truly perceptive scholar. Please send your response to: [dahs19335@gmail.com](mailto:dahs19335@gmail.com).



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## Ashbridge Artifact

When the Ashbridge House was restored back in the early 2000s, the end of this huge beam over one of our fireplaces was left exposed and can be seen inside a closet to the right of the fireplace. It measures about 16 inches x 16 inches and is either oak or chestnut. This part of the house was built between 1725 and 1750. There are about 100 growth rings visible on this beam so the tree this was sawn from was probably a sapling in the early 1600s!



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# Advertisements for Non-Profits

## ***West Caln Historical Society***

The West Caln Historical Society will hold a meeting on Tuesday, January 21, 2020 at 7 P.M. in the West Caln Municipal Building, 721 West Kings Highway, Wagontown, PA on the subject of: **Stagecoach Trolley through Lancaster and Chester County**. The speaker will be Herb Fisher, historian and photo collector.

## ***Central Presbyterian Church Community Luncheon***

Central Presbyterian Church, 100 W Uwchlan Ave, Downingtown, PA 19335, holds a monthly Community Luncheon on the first Thursday of each month, October through May from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Their ever-popular chili, chicken corn noodle, vegetable beef, and cream of potato soups are sold along with sandwiches, salad platters, homemade desserts and beverages. Gluten free options are available. For take out service, call 610-269-1576 and ask for the kitchen. Bring a friend, meet a neighbor, or come alone and enjoy good food and fellowship.

## ***Lyme Disease Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania***

The Lyme Disease Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, an education and support group for patients and caregivers who have been affected by Lyme Disease will meet on the following dates in 2020: January 15, April 15, June 17, and October 21. Meetings are at the Kennett Friends Meeting House on PA Rt 82 (125 W. Sickle St., Kennett Square, PA 19348). Meetings are free and all are welcome. Check [www.lymepa.org](http://www.lymepa.org) for directions.

## ***Chester County Marine Corps League Detachment***

BINGO on the first and third Saturday of every month, 420 Chestnut Street. Public welcome. Kitchen opens at 5:30, Bingo Cards on sale at 6:00, Early Bird Special 6:30. Food is available for purchase. Funds used by the Marine Corps League and Marine Corps League Ladies Auxiliary to help veterans from all branches of the service as well as others in the community.

## ***Greater Downingtown Business and Professional Women (BPW)***

Meets monthly on the 2nd Wednesday evening, at 6 pm, in the Thorndale Inn for a dinner, networking, program and meeting. All area women are welcome. Most nights there is a program such as a speaker. Call Cindy Markley for your reservation for dinner at 610-363-1404. We meet each month from September to June.

## ***Joseph's People, Downingtown chapter***

An ecumenical support mission to help unemployed or underemployed people. The group is entirely conducted by volunteers and has been at St. Joseph's since 1995. Meets at 7:30 PM on the 2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the month. All are welcome. Visit web page, <http://josephspeople.org/our-chapters/downingtown/>, or just come to a meeting at St. Joseph's Parish Meeting Room behind the school, 460 Manor Ave., Downingtown. Call 610-873-7117. Leave Message. Leader: Cheryl Spaulding, Email: [cheryl.spaulding@josephspeople.org](mailto:cheryl.spaulding@josephspeople.org).

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## Historical Society's Wish List

The Downingtown Area Historical Society is a non-profit organization proudly maintaining the 310-year-old Ashbridge House and a large archives. The society can always use gifts in kind with an immediate need for:

- General household items and office supplies including:
  - Pens and pencils
  - Scotch tape and masking tape
  - Copier paper (both color and white)
  - Light bulbs
  - Paper towels
  - Large and small trash bags
- Amazon gift cards or gift cards to Home Depot or Lowes. Sometimes we need to make quick purchases so gift cards would come in very handy.

To make a tax-deductible cash donation, use this link or send a check to the address below. Thank you!



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### Downingtown Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 9, Downingtown, PA 19335

610-269-1709

[dths1709@gmail.com](mailto:dths1709@gmail.com)

<https://www.downingtownhistory.org>

Like us on Facebook:



Check out our *Then & Now* series on YouTube:



### DAHS Board of Directors

**President:** Jim Sundman

**Vice President:** Phil Dague

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