

42 A Tragedy and a Celebration

By David Cochran



On Wednesday, March 2, 1932, two unrelated headlines on the front page of *The Hopewell Herald*, a weekly newspaper that is still published, reported dramatically different local events—a tragedy and a celebration. It covered the infamous Lindbergh baby kidnapping and the centennial celebration of Blawenburg(h) Reformed Church. What a combination of headlines.

Of course, the Lindbergh kidnapping was big news all around the world. After all, Colonel Lindbergh was an international hero who just five years earlier became the first pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Everybody knew Lucky Lindy. He built a house known as Highfields on Sourland Mountain, just north of Hopewell Borough so he could retreat from all the commotion that surrounded his fame. The house was large and remote. It had its own airstrip.

But what happened on March 1 brought a great deal of commotion to the Hopewell area. The headline in *The Hopewell Herald* read:

COLONEL LINDBERGH'S SON IS STOLEN

BABY KIDNAPPED LAST NIGHT FROM NURSERY BETWEEN 7:30 AND 10:00 O'CLOCK

PLANES SEARCH SOURLAND MOUNTAIN

Charles and Ann Lindbergh's 20-month-old son was taken from the second floor of their home in East Amwell Township. Demands for money ensued, but what became known as the *Crime of the Century* had a horrible result on May 12, 1932 when the body of Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Jr. was found along Carter Road just south of Hopewell Borough.

On the night of the abduction, young Charles's nurse, Betty Gow, reported the toddler missing at 10pm. A ransom note demanding \$50,000 was found on the second-floor window sill in the child's room.



Highfields in 1932. A ladder is hoisted to the window in the baby's room.

The Lindbergh kidnapping sent law enforcement into high action as they tracked down every clue regarding the crime. It dominated the news for months, and it is still the source of much controversy today. Many books have been written about it, reenactments have been done at the Hunterdon County Courthouse in Flemington, and scores of conspiracy theories have been sparked.

The late Bob Saums, a lifelong Blawenburg resident, remembered the kidnapping in a Van Harlingen Historical Society oral history. "I was 10 years old. I remember that Jake Stryker had it (the store on the southeast corner of Rt. 518 and Great Road) then, because they had [H. V.]

Kaltenborn as the (CBS) newscaster. He came on a small plane that landed in the field on the southwest corner of Route 518 and the Great Road (then Van Zandt farmland, now Cherry Valley Country Club).” Kaltenborn’s live radio reports from Hopewell kept the nation apprised of the kidnapping news.

The media weren’t the only ones coming to Blawenburg because of the kidnapping. Older and former residents have heard family stories of how the State Police, the only police in the Blawenburg area at the time, stopped at many houses to interview people and searched many barns to see if the perpetrator(s) were still in the area.

WANTED

INFORMATION AS TO THE
WHEREABOUTS OF



CHAS. A. LINDBERGH, JR.

OF HOPEWELL, N. J.

SON OF COL. CHAS. A. LINDBERGH

World-Famous Aviator

This child was kidnaped from his home
in Hopewell, N. J., between 8 and 10 p. m.
on Tuesday, March 1, 1932.

DESCRIPTION:

Age, 20 months	Hair, blond, curly
Weight, 27 to 30 lbs.	Eyes, dark blue
Height, 29 inches	Complexion, light
Deep dimple in center of chin	
Dressed in one-piece coverall night suit	

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO

**COL. H. N. SCHWARZKOPF, TRENTON, N. J., or
COL. CHAS. A. LINDBERGH, HOPEWELL, N. J.**

ALL COMMUNICATIONS WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE

March 11, 1932

COL. H. NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF
Supt. New Jersey State Police, Trenton, N. J.

Two years later, Richard Hauptmann was arrested, tried, convicted, and executed for the murder of the young child. Much controversy still swirls around whether the right man was convicted. The crime led Congress to pass the Federal Kidnapping Act, also known as the Lindbergh Law or Little Lindbergh Law. This law allows Federal authorities to step in when a felon transports a kidnapped person across state lines. Even though young Charles was not transported across state lines, this law helped clarify when the Federal authorities should get involved in kidnapping cases.

The Happier Headline



Blawenburg Church in 1906. Note the sheds to the left and behind the church for the horses and carriages.

Meanwhile, in the village of Blawenburg, just over four miles away from the Highfields, the church congregation was getting plans together for a big celebration. *The Hopewell Herald* headline on the left side of the front page delivered a different message from the Lindbergh headline on the right side.

BLAWENBURGH CHURCH CELEBRATING 100TH ANNIVERSARY

CENTENNIAL PROGRAM AT BLAWENBURG

TODAY MARKS DATE ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO WHEN WELL KNOWN ORGANIZATION STARTED

SPECIAL FEATURES SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

In the fall of 1931, extensive repairs and improvements were made to the church in preparation for the centennial of its organization. The church was built in 1830-31 as the village of Blawenburg was emerging. The church began as the Second Reformed Dutch Church of Harlingen, but in March 1832, the church became independent and was organized as the Reformed Dutch Church of Blawenburgh.

Over its first hundred years, the village had changed little and the church, albeit worn from 100 years of use, looked remarkably like its original version. The Consistory wanted to spruce things up for the big celebration, so they embarked on a restoration plan. According to the 2007

church history book, “The interior and exterior of the church were painted. New linoleum and carpets were laid, and the walls were re-papered. The church cellar was enlarged to accommodate a new furnace and the secondary stove that sat in the back of the church was removed.” With these renovations, the church was in good shape and debt free.



The old stove in back of the church was removed in 1931. (Look just left of center below the chandelier.)

At the time, Blawenburg Church had what is known as a “stated supply pastor.” Rev. Ernest N. Feind served as a substitute preacher while the church was without an installed pastor. To commemorate the centennial celebration, Consistory leaders requested that Rev. Feind write a centennial history of the church.

Not a lot is known about what took place at the celebrations on Saturday, March 5 and Sunday, March 6. There was preaching, historical displays, and food and stories to share. Fred T. Skillman, father of the late Tom Skillman and chronicler of local history, prepared a display of historical papers. Rev. John E. Kuizenga, D.D. preached the sermon at the anniversary service. He was a Professor of Bible and Philosophy at Hope College, Professor and President of Western Theological Seminary, and at the time of the centennial celebration, Professor of Apologetics and Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary.

These two events were dramatically different from each other. As we head toward the bi-centennial of the church in just a dozen years, it continues to serve the community through good times and bad. Unfortunately, the evil, greed, or other negative aspects of human nature that led

to the Lindbergh kidnapping, are still with us. Perhaps learning how to deal with the forces of evil and counter them with the forces of good is something each generation has to learn. As the folk song *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* by the Kingston Trio wonders, “When will they ever learn, when will they ever learn?”

Blawenburg Facts

1. When Blawenburg Church held its centennial celebration, the leaders made a decision to “go modern.” When guests arrived by train at the Skillman Station, church members picked them up by car!
 2. While Rev. Feind was just a temporary pastor at Blawenburg Church, he had an impact on the church. In addition to accomplishing the physical improvements to the building, Rev. Feind established children’s sermons, encouraged youth to join the choir, and reminded church members of their obligation to make visitors feel welcome.
 3. When the Lindbergh child was kidnapped, there were so many newspaper reporters and souvenir hunters walking around the property that many forensic clues were lost.
 4. The Lindbergh house and property has served many purposes. The Lindberghs left Highfields on the day that Charles identified his son’s body and never returned. The property was turned over to a Board of Trustees in 1941 and became a facility for juvenile rehabilitation in 1952. Today, it is known as DOVES, a treatment program for female juveniles with behavioral and substance abuse problems.
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Share your Lindberg Story

Do you stories that are told in your family about the Lindberg kidnapping? Please share them by writing a comment below.

Sources

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highfieldss_\(Amwell_and_Hopewell,_New_Jersey\)#Rehabilitation_center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highfieldss_(Amwell_and_Hopewell,_New_Jersey)#Rehabilitation_center)

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Photo credits

Hopewell Herald front page – Framed newspaper shared by the late Grace Terhune and used in the church history book in 2007

Church stove – photo shared by Jane and Bill Van Zandt

Highfields – various sources

Wanted poster - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lindbergh_kidnapping

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