posts from facebook

Attempted Robbery at Berwyn Bank

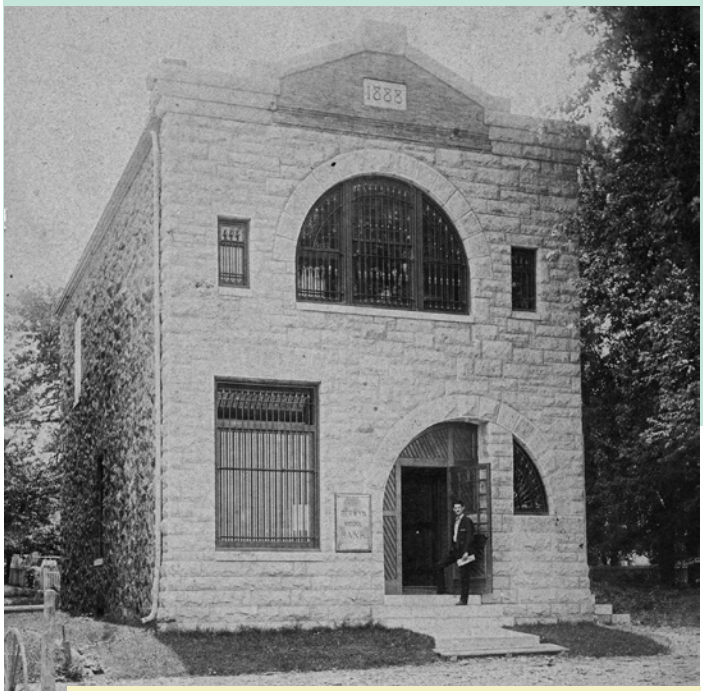
Adapted from a post, originally published on the Society's facebook page by curator Meg Wiederseim on 10 June 2023, that presented a remarkable newspaper story from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* dated March 12, 1899.

BROKE INTO A BANK - Daring Attempt to Rob a Financial Institution at Berwyn

Special to The Inquirer — BERWYN — March 11, 1899

"Early this morning a daring attempt was made to rob the Berwyn National Bank, and until noon it was not known whether the burglars had been successful or not. With tools which had been stolen from a shed used by workmen of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the intruders had little difficulty in breaking through the massive outer doors of the building.

Apparently they were not afraid of making a noise, as the locks were simply squashed to pieces with sledges. Once inside, they set about in a businesslike manner to break their way into vaults where thousands of dollars are stored.



(ABOVE) The original Berwyn National Bank. (BNB1) The date 1888 engraved in the limestone façade of the building commemorates the year of its organization. *Courtesy of TEHS Archives.*

Four holes were bored in the outer door of the vault and the combination lock skillfully removed. Through this opening nitroglycerin was poured and exploded, but the massive safe itself resisted all attempts. The lock was destroyed, but the explosion forced a piece of steel into a catch of one of the inner bolts. The cracksmen evidently expected to insert a steel bar through the ruined lock and pull back the bolts. But this could not be done, owing to the fortunate accident mentioned. The burglars evidently gave up the job, not having time to extend their operations.

In leaving the building they closed the doors and endeavored to conceal all outward signs of their work, and it was this action on their part which led to the fear that they had opened the vault and made off with the booty.

The attempted robbery was not known until 4 o'clock, when William Kerr, the watchman, discovered the condition of affairs and immediately summoned J. Comly Hall, cashier of the bank. Upon investigation he found the outside dial of the Safe damaged to such an extent that he telegraphed for an expert workman. By this time the bank was surrounded by crowds of anxious depositors who set up a shout of joy when the valuables were found intact.

Cashier Hall states that everything indicates the work of expert safe-breakers, who had taken advantage of the temporary absence of the watchman.

(From the *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 12, 1899, p. 6)

For over 130 years the building at this location has been the "local" bank for the village of Berwyn. The original occupant, Berwyn National Bank, organized in 1888, operated in the structure until it was renovated and enlarged in the early 1930s. The bank's name changed five times over the years as the result of various mergers and acquisitions until finally, as CoreStates Bank, it closed its doors in the 1990s. Malvern Federal relocated to the building in September of 1998 and once again the bank serves the community.

For more information, please see "The Berwyn National Bank, Now the Community Bank and Trust Company" by Sara Nuzum, *TEHCQ* Vol. 15 No. 1 (April 1968) pp. 10–1; "Berwyn Bank" in "Berwyn Village Walk" by Herb Fry & Jack Ansley *TEHCQ* Vol. 37 No. 4 (October 1999) pp. 119–120.



(LEFT) Present-day view of the renovated Berwyn National Bank building, now Malvern Bank. *Courtesy © John O. Senior.*



(RIGHT) Joseph W. Sharp (1828–1908) was a founding member and the first president of the bank. For more information, please see "They Built Berwyn: Joseph W. Sharp" by Frank Moreshead, *TEHCQ* Vol. 31 No. 4 (October 1993) pp. 142-144. *Courtesy of TEHS Archives.* (SHA19)

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