

Newton Police Department

Timeline of Significant Incidents

The Officers of the Newton Police Department have a long history of responding to some of the most critical emergencies in Town and conducting major investigations involving residents, business owners and visitors to the Town of Newton. The Department has effectively adapted to the ever-changing trends in criminal activity over the years. Persistent criminal activity continues to be suppressed and reduced by the proactive efforts of police and their tenacious cooperative investigations.

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| 6/1/1910 | Police Department Established |
| 8/7/1934 | Police responded to Cherry Street at 9:15 PM for a man with a shotgun reported to be drunk. Upon arrival, police disarmed Theodore Halsey and shortly afterward police found a man (Henry Robinson) and woman (identified only with last name of Smith) who had both suffered gunshot wounds. The shooting took place on Slate Hill Road. The victims were taken to the Newton Hospital which had recently opened in 1934. Halsey was charged with assault with a deadly weapon. |
| 2/25/1941 | At 7 AM, Police received a call of a shooting at 6 Trinity Street which was a rooming house at the time. The responding officer investigated and found that the victim, identified as Mrs. Drake, had been shot and killed. Officers conducted a canvass of the rooming house and several residents stated that they saw Coley Drake, the husband, running from the building after they heard 4 or 5 shots fired. Officers responded to Drake's residence on Spring Street and discovered that he had shot himself in the head. A .32 caliber revolver was found in Drake's residence. Further investigation showed that the Coley Drake killed his wife and then killed himself with the revolver. |
| 6/5/1941 | At 6:45 pm Officer E. Leeper responded to a call of a man struck by the #1047 train. The accident occurred on Diller Avenue in the "back of the old shoe factory." The victim's name was Peter Hogelson who lived at 20 Sussex Street. Engineer of train Fred Rasnick, said he did not see anyone ahead on the tracks but saw a man on the crossing fly in front of the engine and fall to the side of the tracks. Rasnick said the train was going about 30 mph when the accident occurred. Hogelson was taken to the hospital where he died at 8:00 pm. Officer Leeper stated that all lights and signals were in working order at the time of the accident. |

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| 6/16/1957 | Vivian Masters, age 20, irate over a traffic ticket, stormed into the Newton Police Department, breaking a glass door and held officers at bay with a shotgun, threatening to shoot them until another officer arrived 15 minutes later and successfully disarmed her. |
| 6/27/1958 | Vivian Masters, age 21, threatened several police officers with 17 inch machete while they were investigating a brawl occurring at 37 Merriam Avenue. She wielded the machete toward the officers who had to pin her down with a coffee table to disarm her and take her into custody. |
| 10/24/1967 | At 3:31 PM on a Tuesday afternoon, Newton Police Officers were dispatched to 107 Spring Street for a report of a shooting. Upon arrival officers found a 12 year old girl, Lynn Belcher, unconscious and breathing heavily with a lot of blood on the back of her head. She was promptly taken to the hospital but unfortunately didn't survive. The Police investigation found that John Rzonca, age 17, had been in possession of a .22 caliber revolver while at Belcher's apartment and did "willfully, feloniously and of his malice aforethought, kill and murder Lynn Belcher." Prior to arrival of Police, Rzonca had moved the body and placed the gun in her hand to make it appear as though the gunshot was self-inflicted. |
| 2/26/1971 | Patrolman Thomas Morris, who was on foot patrol, stopped Herbert Bensley, age 22, who he had just observed to commit a burglary to Sasse Glass on Water Street. However, Bensley quickly pointed a handgun at Ptl. Morris' head, disarmed him and threatened to kill him. Ptl. Morris reasoned with him and Bensley fled. He was later caught by other Newton Officers. |
| 1/26/1973 | A suspicious missing person investigation led police to find that Betty Lou Falk, age 43, had been murdered by David Huff, age 35 and partially buried in the wooded area behind #6 Hicks Avenue Newton. The case was cooperatively investigated with the NJ State Police. Huff was charged with murder. |

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| 11/14/1973 | <p>At 9:08 PM, Police went to 177 Main St., the Main Street Grocery, for a reported Armed Robbery. Two men with a pistol and a shotgun robbed money from the store clerk and a customer at gun point and fled in their vehicle. The vehicle they fled in matched a car that was stopped earlier that day by another Newton Police Officer who knew that the car had been seen near a home on Mt. View St. Further investigation lead officers to find the vehicle at a residence in Byram. This lead to the arrests of Gary Steffens, age 22, and Gary Talmadge, age 20.</p> |
| 3/21/1980 | <p>At 2:30 in the afternoon, Police were called to the Ding Dong Dairy located at 267 Spring Street for a hold up and robbery at gunpoint. A male subject wearing a ski mask pointed a handgun at the cashier and ordered her to give him money or else he would shoot her. He then fled with \$125.00. Within an hour, a cooperative investigation with the State Police and Andover Police resulted in two arrests. James Dutton, age 18, along with a 17 year old companion, both from Newton, were arrested. The money, ski masks and a handgun were recovered. Dutton was sentenced to 7 1/2 years in NJ State Prison to run concurrent with a 20 year sentence that he had received for an Aggravated Manslaughter charge.</p> |
| 4/13/1980 | <p>The Newton Police investigation into the death of Charles Delaney, age 20, remains unsolved. Delaney had been operating his motorcycle at about 1 PM on the railbed in the vicinity of Diller Avenue and Hicks Avenue when he struck a wire that had been strung across the path causing his death. Investigation by police was unable to determine who had put the cable there. Many interviews and possible leads were followed up on in the years following the incident to no avail. A \$3,155 reward was offered to anyone with information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person responsible for this crime.</p> |

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| 6/4/1982 | <p>Newton Police Officers responded to 10 Clinton Street at 3:17 AM for a reported stabbing and found the victim, 18 year old Linda Clark, had been repeatedly stabbed by an unknown male who had entered her residence while she was sleeping and began to repeatedly stab her and cut her with a butcher knife. A blood trail from the scene led police to the attacker who had also been injured during the assault. Further investigation led to the arrest of Daniel Reynolds, age 19, who was charged with attempted murder.</p> |
| 8/16/1982 | <p>At about 10:15 AM, Newton Police were alerted that Daniel Reynolds and Robert Kuczynski had just escaped from the Sussex County Jail. Massive searches were done with bloodhounds and personnel from other agencies. Kuczynski surrendered to police at a home in Stillwater shortly after midnight. Reynolds met with a Reverend on Division Street whom accompanied him when he surrendered to police. Reynolds was in possession of a note in case he got shot. The note said that he was tired of living like an animal in jail and he was willing to meet God his Savior. The two had planned the escape for several days and when the guards weren't looking, they jumped up and climbed over the wall in the rec area using the basketball hoop. Warden Joe Diemar, who was formerly known as the professional wrestler 'The Masked Marvel', saw the escape as he was walking into the jail and initiated the search.</p> |
| 5/7/1983 | <p>Newton Police Officers responded to a disturbance at about 1:15 AM at the Sly Fox tavern located on Lower Spring Street and found that Thomas Blair, age 37, was a victim of a gunshot. Shortly afterward, Cecil Kinsey, age 30, came to the Police Department and confessed to shooting Blair. Kinsey was charged with Attempted Homicide and weapons offenses. Further investigation also led to charging Dwayne Campbell, age 26, with attempted homicide for attempting to shoot Blair with a .22 caliber handgun.</p> |

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| <p>11/1/1985</p> | <p>At 10:33 PM Police were called to the Newton Shoprite on Water Street for an Armed Robbery. Upon arrival it was learned that a man, whose face was covered, armed with two handguns had apparently hid in the store until closing. He then confronted employees at gunpoint and forced 10 of them to enter the walk-in freezer while another employee, age 17, was shot with a .32 caliber bullet as he was running away. The victim was shot in the right buttock. While police were responding, the suspect fled through a rear fire exit where it is believed a car was waiting. Police were unable to locate him. Shoprite offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the suspect's arrest and conviction. Years of continued lengthy investigation developed James William Payne of Delaware as a suspect. Payne was a suspect in similar robberies and had a connection to a resident of Newton that he had visited during the time of the Shoprite robbery. However, the County Prosecutor believed that there was insufficient evidence available on which to base an indictment."</p> |
| <p>1/22/1986</p> | <p>A woman, age 32, and her 4 year old daughter were abducted while in their vehicle when they were at the Mcdonalds on Water Street in Newton. Cooperatively investigated with the NJSP and Ogdensburg PD, it was learned that Larry Smith, age 42, had forced his way into their vehicle under threats of bodily harm, stole money and sexually assaulted the victim mother. He forced them to drive to Ogdensburg where he was dropped off and then went to a bar. The victim then went to the police. It was later learned that Smith had also assaulted another woman on Water Street prior to doing the kidnapping. Smith was sentenced to 19 years in State Prison.</p> |
| <p>6/24/1986</p> | <p>During a Newton High School graduation, a loud explosion was heard coming from the woods. Police investigated and found an undetonated pipe bomb and identified two subjects who fled the area in a vehicle at a high rate of speed, namely Stephen Lowick, age 18 and Frederick Hatem, age 18. The NJSP Arson/Bomb Unit and military personnel from Fort Monmouth diffused the remaining improvised explosive device harmless. The two were charged with 2nd degree crimes of causing an explosion and possession of destructive device. Apparently, the two were resentful since they were not allowed to participate in the commencement.</p> |

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| 2/7/1990 | <p>Charter Savings & Loan bank on Main Street reported being robbed at 2:46 PM and gave a description of the suspect in a vehicle fleeing. Police responded with assistance of Andover PD and the Prosecutor's Office and pursued the suspect until it crashed into patrol cars in Andover Twp. John Scannell, age 28 of Somerset County, was arrested and received 6 years in State Prison for robbery.</p> |
| 5/7/1990 | <p>Police responded to Merriam Avenue for a found bike that was determined to belong to Herbert Richards Jr. which lead to the filing of a missing person report for Richards who had been missing for several days. The area where the bike was found had the appearance that a struggle had taken place there. Further investigation lead to the arrest of four suspects who forcibly abducted Richards on his way home from work and took him to work in the carnival, where he was previously employed, since he was the only one who knew how to operate the Ferris Wheel for Valley Amusements based in Wayne NJ. The victim was recovered on 5/8/1990.</p> |
| 6/22/1990 | <p>A Newton Police Officer stopped a suspicious light colored vehicle seen operating on Water Street that had blood smears on the exterior of the car. The car was being operated by Russell De Witte who through further investigation it was determined that he had just killed a man in Lafayette Twp. and then stole his vehicle.</p> |
| 11/10/1991 | <p>The County Medical Examiner informed the Police that he received an infant boy that appears to have suffered injuries causing his death consistent with Shaken Infant Syndrome. The 6 week old boy was taken to the Hospital where the mother, Mary Benson, told nurses she found the baby in the crib blue and unresponsive. The hospital was unable to revive the victim, Christopher Benson. An investigation ensued and showed that Antonial 'AJ' Swinson, the mother's boyfriend, had shaken the baby because he was frustrated when the baby was crying. Swinson was charged with manslaughter and received 7 years sentence in prison.</p> |

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| 8/18/1995 | <p>Wanda and Harry Gratton called 9-1-1 at 4:29 AM reporting that they just found their infant son, Justin, 19 days old, wasn't breathing. Officers responded, attempted to revive and transported the infant to the Hospital but the boy couldn't be saved. Further investigation led to charging Wanda Gratton, age 32, with Manslaughter for causing the death of the child by smothering him with a pillow. The case led to suspicion about another infant child, Michael Gratton, that had died under apparently similar circumstances on 10/10/1993 at 36 Merriam Avenue whereas the cause of death was suspected of being SIDS. Wanda Gratton was sentenced to 12 years in prison.</p> |
| 5/4/1997 | <p>Officers responded to the Texas Steakhouse on Woodside Avenue at about 12:30 AM for a report of someone possibly breaking in to the restaurant. A suspect seen fleeing from the restaurant upon arrival of patrols was arrested, searched and secured in a patrol car. However, upon arrival back at headquarters the suspect had removed the handcuffs, assaulted an officer and fled on foot. While fleeing, he attempted to carjack a vehicle being operated by a woman with her 3 month old passenger but the attempt failed. It was learned the next morning that he had burglarized a home on Hamilton Street where he got keys and stole a vehicle. The car, which wasn't reported stolen yet, was seen speeding and was pursued by Andover Police but he managed to elude them. The vehicle was recovered in Dover at the train station several days later. With further investigation, he was identified as Wade Lohse, age 31, who had recently burglarized an FBI vehicle in Philadelphia where he stole a bulletproof vest, handcuffs with a key, a shotgun, and a .357 magnum revolver. He was suspected of being involved in an organized burglary ring. Lohse was arrested by the FBI on 10/8/1997 in New Orleans, LA and extradited back to Newton NJ. He was sentenced to 7 years in NJ State Prison as well as a Federal prison sentence.</p> |

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| 8/14/1997 | <p>Newton Police received a 911 call at 2:00 PM from an employee at Newton Mental Health Unit reporting a woman with a gun, Officers responded and a one hour stand-off ensued between the woman and police. Officers and hospital staff worked to negotiate with the 41 year old female who refused to put down a .22 caliber revolver and ultimately used the gun against herself, shooting herself once in the chest. Investigation identified the woman as Bridie Maloney who was an out patient of mental health. Maloney survived the gunshot wound and was ultimately charged with Unlawful possession of a weapon.</p> |
| 6/2/2000 | <p>Officers went to Hamilton Street after a mother, Christine Hayes, age 33, found her unresponsive son, Jack Hayes (13 months old) had been left in her vehicle restrained in the child safety seat while parked in the street with the windows up for several hours. During that time, the mother was in a nearby residence with a friend. The intense heat built up in the car causing the child's temperature to rise over 108 degrees. The boy could not be revived and the mother was arrested and charged with Reckless Manslaughter.</p> |
| 6/30/2000 | <p>Police investigated a mother's suspicion about the odd behavior exhibited by her 2 year old son and learned that he had been repeatedly sexually assaulted by a man who had been babysitting the child named Ora D. Battles. Battles, President of the College's AIDS Brigade, was infected with the virus. He befriended the victim's single mother and offered to help by watching the child. He was charged with Agg. Sex Assault and was the first person in NJ to be charged with crime of a Diseased Person Committing an Act of Sexual Penetration.</p> |

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| 12/2/2001 | <p>Newton Police investigated four burglaries that occurred to the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office over a period time from April 2001 to December 2001 and stole guns and drugs from their evidence vault. A break in the case came when a citizen observed a defendant fleeing from the burglarized office late at night and tackled him near the Presbyterian Church and held him there until Police arrived. Further investigation led to the arrest of Jeff Joice, age 40 and his brother John Joice, age 42, both from Montclair who had relatives that reside on Church Street in Newton. DNA taken from broken glass in the Prosecutor's Office matched the DNA of Jeff Joice. Search warrants executed at the defendants' home in Montclair and on Church Street in Newton recovered guns, body armor and other items stolen from the Office.</p> |
| 12/7/2002 | <p>Police responded to 102 Merriam Avenue for a reported home invasion where 3 men and a woman forced their way into the home and stole over \$2000 from the victims at knife point. The victims, Chris Medore and Eduardo Obinque, were severely beaten, bound and gagged. Investigation revealed that Medore allegedly owed another Newton resident, Jeanette Gerola, money and the suspects were collecting on the debt. Detectives traced leads that brought them to Brooklyn NY where they worked with NYPD Detectives to locate and arrest Aubrey Pike, Daniel Romain, Shaquanna Robinson and another juvenile suspect.</p> |
| 3/14/2003 | <p>A release of propane at the Able Energy facility on Diller Avenue in Newton resulted in an explosion, causing extensive damage and the evacuation of over 1,000 town residents for almost a week. The fire at the Able Energy site was the largest fire in Sussex County history, with a 6 day response and over 35 fire departments from across northern New Jersey. Detectives worked to identify and document what occurred in contrast to proper and lawful industry safety standards and procedures for handling this volatile fuel.</p> |
| 9/16/2004 | <p>Officers went to the Exxon on Water Street for a man who was a victim of a stabbing that occurred in front of the High Rise apartment building. The victim, Daryl Trent, knew his assailant. Further investigation, led to charges against Glen Mays who had immediately fled the area and wasn't apprehended until November 2006 in Newport News Virginia and was convicted for attempted murder after a jury trial in 2009.</p> |

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| 4/30/2005 | <p>At about 10 PM, Doris Zayacz, age 57, was viciously attacked as she was getting into her car in her driveway located on Lincoln Place. After being repeatedly stabbed in the face, head and arm, the unknown assailant fled with her purse as she was left for dead, however she managed to go back into her home and call 9-1-1. A police investigation ensued which led to the arrest of Brandon Petersen, age 15, who stole the victim's money after stabbing her and then threw his clothes and the victim's purse into Lake Lenape in Andover Twp. Petersen was waived up to be tried as an adult and was convicted of Attempted Murder.</p> |
| 8/19/2005 | <p>At 12:43 AM, Patrolman Dean Coppolella was investigating a suspicious vehicle parked on the side of Hicks Avenue when it suddenly started and raced toward him. The vehicle struck Officer Coppolella who was left laying unconscious in the roadway. Officers quickly responded to the area when calls by dispatch to check on him went unanswered. Officers worked tirelessly to try to determine who was responsible however the investigation remains unsolved.</p> |
| 5/18/2006 | <p>Daniel Reynolds, age 45, stabbed Michael Hand, age 42, in the neck while they were at a rooming house at 96 Main Street. Police responded and after investigation found Reynolds who had fled. He was charged with Attempted Murder and sentenced to a 10 year prison term.</p> |
| 5/31/2007 | <p>Police officers were called to a residence in Town when parents saw their 14 year old daughter engaged in suspicious communications on an internet chat room. Further investigation revealed that a 26 year old Midland Park man, Felipe Florentino, had met the girl online and over time had lured her into agreeing to meet with him. Eventually, they had six encounters where they engaged in sexual activity at Memory Park in Newton as well as at the defendant's home in Midland Park. Detectives searched his Midland Park home and arrested Florentino who was charged with 2nd degree crime of sexual assault and electronic luring of a child.</p> |

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| 6/6/2007 | <p>Police Officers went to 177 Main St., the Main Street Grocery, for a report of a smash and grab burglary. Suspects could be seen on surveillance video. Detectives worked in conjunction with New Jersey State Police Detectives to link the suspects to an organized burglary gang from Jersey City that had committed about 30 other crimes in Sussex County and over a hundred burglaries and thefts across New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. They were also charged Federally. The Police Detectives also worked together with US Marshalls deputies to apprehend members of the crew. Trent Janulis, age 34, and Brian Tice, age 26, were charged and sentenced to 10 years in Prison.</p> |
| 6/12/2008 | <p>A drug distribution investigation centered on 160 Spring Street led to a mid-day law enforcement raid of the first floor apartment where four people were arrested for drug distribution. Four Hundred Seventy-Six bags of crack cocaine were recovered along with \$649 in US currency suspected of being profits from the sale of the controlled dangerous substance. Officers arrested David Gaskins, age 38, of Paterson, Johnny Moscagiuri, 30, of Newton, Kimberly Laplaca, 28, of Newton, and Latasha Best, 29, of Daytona Beach, Fla., The investigation began with suspicious observations from Newton Police Officers and members of the public which developed into further surveillance and a cooperative investigation with the Sussex County Guns, Gangs and Narcotics Task Force. The drug seizure was one of the largest in Newton history.</p> |
| 3/14/2009 | <p>Shortly after the end of the annual Saint Patrick's Day parade, the body of Angela Bellifemini, age 27, was found in her apartment at 211 Spring Street, with several stab wounds to her neck. The investigation led police to arrest Alexander Antoniades, age 48, of Nutley who was charged with her murder. A DNA examination matched the victim's blood to blood found on the defendant's foot. Newton Police Detectives worked cooperatively with the Prosecutor's Office investigators and State Police Detectives to collect significant additional evidence in support of the criminal charges against Antoniades.</p> |

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| 1/8/2010 | <p>Officers responded to J&G Pet Food located on East Clinton St. to investigate a report of a missing person, namely Jeffrey Muller, age 59, the owner of the pet food store. The investigation revealed that Muller had been kidnapped by three men armed with handguns and a stun gun and then taken to Missouri while bound and gagged until Muller could escape after their vehicle became disabled. Newton Police, State Police, the FBI and several Missouri Police departments worked cooperatively to apprehend the actors responsible. The investigation revealed that the trio had abducted the wrong person who just happened to have the same name as the intended victim who had previously lived elsewhere in New Jersey. Detectives from Newton along with the NJ State Police travelled to Missouri to conduct further investigation and to escort the victim back to his family in New Jersey.</p> |
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