

**QUESTIONS STILL UNANSWERED  
IN THE DEATH OF STEPHEN ZAHIHCHUCK  
By Marie Coady**

**Not only are there hidden portals in Woburn where unsolved mysteries wait to be resolved, there are also streets that lie uncharted on the city's official map. But erasing the street where a heinous crime occurred doesn't mean the murder victim will live again, because Jones Avenue does indeed exist.**

**In 1923, when the railroad was the life blood of the city, the East Nichols Street station made transportation a reality for the people of North Woburn. The tracks then ambled through the cluttered neighborhoods there and chugged over the line into the Land of Nod or Goshen as Wilmington was once called.**

**That was also a time when Dexter Avenue ran all the way from Main Street to New Boston Road, crossing the tracks and cutting Longwood Avenue in half. Jones Avenue ran a straight line off Longwood and cut across Mann Avenue, Foster Avenue and Chester Avenue all the way to Baldwin Avenue.**

**When the police got a call on Monday morning at 10:30 on November 26, 1923, they didn't have to turn off Main at School and bear left onto Merrimac, and then take the sharp left onto Dartmouth to Longwood to get to Jones Avenue as they do today. They could take a more direct route onto Dexter from Main and cross the railroad tracks, taking a sharp left again and veering onto Jones Avenue. This is the route they took that November morning to investigate a suspicious death.**

**When they wheeled up in front of 8 Jones Avenue, it's a sure thing it didn't have aluminum siding like it does today, but the original structure has remained pretty much as it was then. They had been called there to view the body of 69 year old Steven Zahihchuck, lying in the dining room of the house, his jaw bone broken, teeth missing and a broken neck. The position of the body was what made coroner Dr. Vernon C. Stewart suspicious, because the story told by the legal tenant of 8 Jones Avenue did not mesh with the doctors' findings.**

In spite of a language barrier, Parosky Chapitzyk unfolded a story which raised eyebrows and caused police to look askance.

Mr. Chaptizyk's explanation was that Zahihchuck had fallen down the steep stairs sometime in the middle of the night and broken his neck. Then as the police began to ask questions of neighbors, conflicting stories began to emerge. The police then noticed there were indeed bloodstains at the foot of the treacherous steps and had no doubt a fall down them would be enough to snap someone's neck and cause instant death. What didn't add up was the fact that Mr. Zahihchuck was not found at the foot of the stairs but many feet away in the dining room. It was also a mystery why his jaw was so precisely broken and teeth missing as if he had been soundly beaten about the face.

On further questioning, Mr. Chapitzyk explained that he had hired the old man to care for his two young children after his wife had died last week. As Mr. Chapitzyk struggled to dress his two children in the kitchen where the stove offered them some warmth from the chill fall air, he stated through an interpreter that the old man had no relatives that he knew of but did have some friends in Lawrence.

When asked to explain why Zahihchuck was so far into the dining room and not at the foot of the stairs as the police would have expected, he had no explanation. He also had no answers as to why the old man was only partly dressed and why it took so long to notify the police. The coroner reported that the body was stone cold when he arrived, and he would have to say that he had been dead quite a while. Yet as the tenant began to emerge as the prime suspect, he still offered no explanation as to why the old man's body had lain there for hours while his two small children had to pass through that room to get to the kitchen.

Chapitzyk said the last person to see the old man alive was a friend named Ludwig Kochowski of Longwood Avenue, and he himself had last seen him when Zahihchuck retired for the night in the bedroom of Chapitzyk's youngest son, John, age five. Beyond that, Parosky Chapitzyk had nothing further to say.

Police at this point, decided that a murder had been committed and there was enough circumstantial evidence that couldn't or wouldn't be explained by further questioning. They placed Chapitzyk under arrest and locked him up for the night without bail.

In court the next morning, he entered a plea of not guilty as advised by attorneys W. H. and J. Henchey. The judge set bail at \$4,000; and since he was able to assure the bond, Chapitzyk was released until further examination could be made the following Saturday.

Evidently, no bill of indictment was ever made against Chapitzyk. His lawyers were successful in arguing for his continued freedom. No further action was ever taken on the matter; and today, the circumstances of Stephen Zahihchuck's death remain a puzzle.

Of course, as you begin to see the story unfold, alarm bells go off. An old man taking care of young children and sleeping in the same room with a 5 year-old boy. These delicate matters were rarely discussed out loud in 1923, but it seems plausible that the authorities had some inkling that Stephen Zahihchuck had given Parkosky Chapitzyk good reason to kill him.

The house at 8 Jones Avenue however still tells sad tales. It stands as it did then, bare of trees, bushes or flowers, with plywood panels blocking the sun from its windows that are nailed shut against prying eyes. The siding around the windows bears the scars of smoke and fire. The house is abandoned and stands silent sentinel in a neighborhood that according to Woburn's town map no longer exists.

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