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The Incredible Mrs. Chadwick

Cassie Chadwick — 19th century con-woman buried in Woodstock

'Incredible' con-woman 'amoral-not dishonest'

By GORD McINTOSH
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Writer

The man who chronicled the life of Eastwood-born swindler-socialite Cassie Chadwick says the heroine of his book wasn't really dishonest.

"Amoral yes, but not dishonest," John Crosbie said at Woodstock Art Gallery this week.

Mrs. Chadwick, nee Betsy Bigle in 1859 led a career in the last half of the 19th century as a forger, clairvoyant, prostitute and socialite, using up a host of aliases and almost as many husbands.

She died at Ohio State Penitentiary in 1907 and was buried in Woodstock at Anglican Cemetery, off Vansittart Avenue.

Mr. Crosbie's newly-published book, *The Incredible Mrs. Chadwick*, describes the woman's life from an ambitious Eastwood girl to the woman whose Cleveland trial attracted world-wide attention after her financial empire collapsed.

The book, which the 55-year-old Mr. Crosbie would only say is doing well in sales, has been published in the United States.

And, Mr. Crosbie said, Hollywood is interested. A prominent producer, whom he wouldn't identify, is talking film rights.

"It will be interesting to see how they're going to squeeze Canada out of the story," Mr. Crosbie said.

"But that's not my end of it. I just write it."

CRIMINAL?
Regardless of how the local woman would be portrayed on film, Mr. Crosbie insists she never did fit the description of criminal.

"I don't regard her as having a criminal mind," Mr. Crosbie said.

But, he said, "she was

certainly a social misfit who tried to fit."

Mrs. Chadwick, who falsely claimed she was the illegitimate daughter of industrialist Andrew Carnegie, wound up as a folk hero, Mr. Crosbie said.

Her life, he said, reads like a perverse Horatio Alger yarn about two decades before the rags-to-riches fad caught on.

She also dared to strive for things other women wouldn't, just before the female suffrage movement.

Those two reasons, Mr. Crosbie said, could explain why an army of reporters flocked to her Cleveland trial—and her Woodstock funeral.

NEWSREELS

The funeral—the biggest thing to happen since Woodstock was incorporated as a city in 1901—may have marked the first time local residents saw newsreel cameras.

Mr. Crosbie said the incredible press coverage towards the end may have been Cassie's last con.

The author suspects most newspaper readers were delighted with her antics.

And the press will always seek out a figure to illustrate an age, he said.

"There was this perverse thing about her nature," Mr. Crosbie said, adding that the woman seemed to be an enigmatic personality. "She was also a practised mesmerist."

"She seemed to be dissatisfied with her audience," he said of Cassie's early life in Eastwood.

"She had this imagination. She was a storyteller."

STAGE

"She wanted life as her

stage. She wanted to be out in the real world."

Mr. Crosbie said he was introduced to Cassie Chadwick by his wife, Patty, two years ago on a plane flight in the United States. An article on swindlers in an airline magazine devoted a paragraph or so to the lady of Eastwood.

So Mr. Crosbie sent a research assistant to track down Cassie's life and antics. Most of the research came from the files of *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, which devoted the most ink to Cassie's assault on the city's once-fashionable Euclid Avenue.

Some of the material came from the morgue of *The Sentinel-Review*.

MYSTERY

But much of the woman's life still remains a mystery. Any surviving relatives, Mr. Crosbie said, were too distant to be useful.

Mrs. Chadwick purchased a home somewhere in Woodstock for her parents but no one knows where.

And maybe she wasn't even buried in the Woodstock cemetery. They said her casket seemed a little light on the day of the funeral.

What is known locally is that at the age of 13, she fleeced several downtown Woodstock merchants in a credit-buying spree. She was carrying business cards then, which said "Miss Elizabeth Bigley, Heiress to Fortune."

Mr. Crosbie, president of the magazine association of Canada, was in the city promoting his book for Merrified Book Shop.

Ironically, when Mr. Crosbie described the woman's dealings at the art gallery, he was using a building donated by Andrew Carnegie at the turn of the century.

Mrs. Cassie Chadwick Dies in Ohio Penitentiary

Was Serving Sentence of Ten Years for Bank Wrecking—Borrowed Immense Sums of Money Right and Left—Banks and Capitalists Easy Victims.

Columbus, Ohio, October 10.—Mrs. Cassie Chadwick, whose amazing financial transactions culminated in the wrecking of an Oberlin, Ohio, bank, died in the women's ward at the Ohio penitentiary tonight at 10.15. Mrs. Chadwick had been in a comatose condition for some hours previous to her death and the end came peacefully. No friends or relatives waited at her bedside, only the prison physician and hospital attendants being present. Her son, Emil Hoover, had been summoned from Cleveland, but he was not expected to arrive before tomorrow.

Mrs. Cassie L. Chadwick, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Bigley, was a native of Woostock, Canada. She first came into public notice in Toledo, O., about 20 years ago where she told fortunes under the name of Madame Deviere. While in this city she forged the name of Richard Brown, Youngstown, Ohio, and for this crime was sent to the penitentiary at Columbus for nine years.

She served but a portion of this sentence and then located in Cleveland where she married a man named Hoover. Her second husband was Dr. LeRoy S. Chadwick of Cleveland, a man of good family and excellent standing in his profession.

In the latter part of 1902, or early in 1903, Mrs. Chadwick, in the presence of her husband, gave to Ira Reynolds, the cashier of the Wade Park bank, of Cleveland, a box containing notes signed with the name of Andrew Carnegie. These forged notes are alleged to have amounted to \$7,500,000. Reynolds gave a receipt for the papers, which described the notes and the signatures upon them. Mrs. Chadwick left with Reynolds as an explanation of the notes, the statement that she was a natural daughter of Carnegie. With the receipt of Reynolds in her possession, Mrs. Chadwick went to different banks and many capitalists making loans and paying not only high interest to the banks but heavy bonuses to bank officials who loaned her the money. The extent of these transactions will never be fully known, but they ran up into the millions. They involved men of high standing in the financial world and caused heavy losses to many banks.

In November, 1904, she was sued by a man named Newton, of Brookline, Mass., from whom she had borrowed a large amount. Other creditors came down upon her and soon he was arrested by the federal authorities on the charge of conspiring with Charles Beckwith, president and A. B. Spear, cashier of a national bank at Oberlin, Ohio, which had been substantially looted. Mrs. Chadwick had obtained from this institution such large sums that it was compelled to close its doors, causing heavy losses to the depositors and ruining many of them.

Mrs. Chadwick, Beckwith and Spear were indicted for a variety of offenses against the national banking laws. Beckwith died before coming to trial. Spear pleaded guilty, was sentenced to seven years in the penitentiary and is now serving time at Columbus, Ohio. Mrs. Chadwick was brought to trial March 6, 1905, and after a hearing which lasted two weeks was found guilty of conspiracy to defraud a national bank, and was sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary.

Her health, which was not good at the time of the trial, failed steadily after its conclusion.

Mrs. Chadwick left one son, Emil Hoover, born of her first marriage. He is now about 20 years old.

Elizabeth Bigley Chadwick's headstone in the Anglican Cemetery, Woodstock, Ontario.

