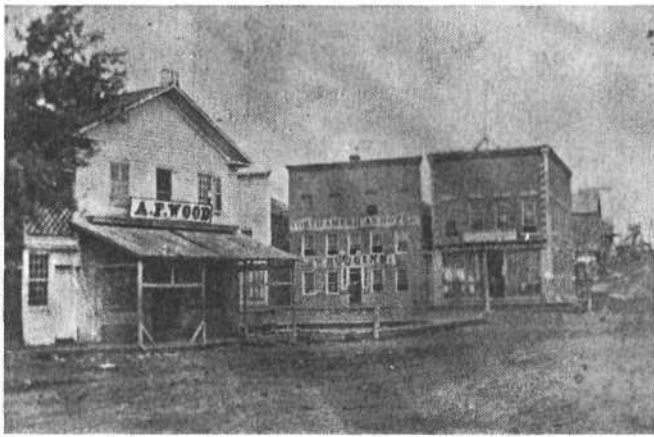


At the age of twelve, her parents sent her and her brother to join her older sister Ellen in Lakefield, Connecticut. Nine years later, she met Richard Aylward, who had emigrated from Carlow in Ireland in 1850 at the age of fourteen. Richard and Mary married at Poughkeepsie, New York, on August 15, 1855. The young couple had decided to move in with Richard's aunt, Mary Ann McRae, at Puslinch, near Guelph, in Canada West. In 1856, they moved 275 kilometres east to Kaladar in Addington County. Five years later, they again moved, to property seventy kilometres north, near the village of Bancroft, in Hastings County, on the edge of the Canadian Shield, where free grants of hundred acres were offered to anyone willing to build a house of at least twenty-by-twenty-three feet and keep at least twelve acres in cultivation for five years. Richard's aunt had settled nearby. By July 1861, the Aylwards were established on Peterson Road with two daughters, a third about to be born, and very little else to show for their time in Canada. Richard



When the constable taking the Aylwards to jail in Belleville stopped for refreshment in Madoc (shown here in the 1860s), two of the prime pieces of evidence, the scythe and the shotgun, were taken by an unknown person.

Aylward set to work clearing a field and earning a few dollars by working for better-off settlers in the neighbourhood. Mary was left to manage alone. By her own account, two days after her baby was born, three men attacked her and her husband, knocking her unconscious with a handspike but failing to kick Richard Aylward to death.

The Aylwards' neighbours on the other side of the road had been there since May 1861. William Munro and his wife, Chrystina Margaret, were Protestants, a lot older than the Aylwards, and relations never seem to have been very cordial. Having sold Munro some hens, the Aylwards were dismayed that the birds were free to cross the road and forage in their brand new wheat field. This became an explicit source of bad relations. Later, Mary Aylward claimed that when she tried to drive the hens from her farm, Munro threw stones at her and shouted abuse. When Munro was busy, his son Alexander (Alick) echoed his father's behaviour. For several days Aylward was summoned home to protect his anxious wife.

**O**n May 16, 1862, Aylward came in from his day's work, sat down to await dinner, and was playing with the baby when he and his wife heard visitors in their yard. Munro, too, had come home, and his wife reported she had heard a shot from across the road. She also claimed one of their hens was missing. Munro and Alick decided to visit the Aylwards' property. When they crossed the road, Mary Aylward appeared with her babe in arms while the two other girls played in the yard. Mrs. Aylward recalled telling Munro to get off her property, to which the older man had replied: "I will not until I get ready, come out and put me from the door if you dare, you d--d w-h-e." Next, Mary's husband appeared. Richard told Munro to get off his property. Munro refused to leave without his hen. Aylward replied that he had not shot the bird, but wished he had. Next the Munros headed west toward Aylward's wheat field to hunt for their hen. Richard picked up his shotgun and followed them.

According to the younger Munro, at the wheat field, Richard turned and levelled his shotgun at the older Munro, who promptly grabbed the muzzle. Richard then pulled a two-barrelled pistol from his shirt. William Munro knocked the weapon out of Richard's hand and told his son to pick it up. Alexander turned his back on the two older men and found the pistol nine or ten metres away. When he rose with the weapon in his hand, Aylward turned his gun toward the boy, who dropped to his knees. Richard fired. The buckshot hit Alexander in the back over his left shoulder. The boy rose and ran for home, streaming blood but carrying the pistol. Later, he claimed, twenty-nine pieces of lead were extracted from his back. Aylward and Munro were left wrestling for control of the shotgun when Mary Aylward appeared, carrying a scythe. She slashed at Munro, as hard as she could, striking his head and then his arm. It was William Munro's turn to stagger home, collapsing inside his doorway in a pool of his own blood.

A week before, Richard's cousin, Isabella McRae, recalled seeing Richard and Mary using the McRaes' grindstone to sharpen the Aylward's scythe. She recalled that Richard had claimed to be getting ready for haying. Since snow was still on the ground, this had struck her mother, Mrs. McRae, as odd. On the evening of May 16, she remembered, Richard and his wife had returned. This time Mary Aylward loaded the shotgun from the McRaes' supplies while her husband carried the scythe. "She said she had cut the head off the old man," Mrs. McRae later recalled in court, "and that Richard had shot Alick." When Mrs. McRae expressed some skepticism, Mary Aylward showed her the blood on the blade. At that point, McRae's son told the Aylwards to leave, and they did. Mrs. McRae hurried to the Munros' cabin and found William still lying on his floor in a pool of blood and unable to speak. Three days later, Mrs. McRae visited again. This time she found him in bed and able to talk, but so weak that, two days later, Munro confessed that he did not think he would live. He was right. William Munro died on May 28, 1862.