

moment and had to be carried from the platform unconscious.

### **DANCES OF DEATH**

Mary's frail body contorted like a grotesque puppet on tangled strings for a minute-and-a-half until life deserted her. Richard continued to struggle for a further minute -- fighting for life, fighting against death -- before he too found final peace. Their lifeless bodies hung for display for a further half-hour for the satisfaction and pleasure of those who came to witness their death.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, two simple caskets containing the bodies of Mary Aylward and Richard Aylward were taken on a horse-drawn wagon the few hundred yards west along Church Street to St. Michael's Church and placed in the centre aisle.

By the time Rev. Brennan ascended the pulpit the church was filled to capacity. His sermon, which was controversial because of its defence of the Aylwards, was filled with deep emotion and on a number of occasions he broke down. Sobbing and crying was heard from the congregation throughout the service. The couple was afterward buried at the church cemetery following the service.

The youngest child of the couple, a baby, and the two older children were separated after the execution. They were adopted and raised by two supportive families.

The case did not die with Mary and Richard, however. The Quebec press became involved in a war of words with Ontario newspapers claiming that the Aylwards were hanged because they were Catholic, and the victim was Protestant. There were charges that the defence counsel was incompetent and that sufficient efforts were not made on appeals.

Mary claimed to the very end that all she did was protect her husband who was being attacked "as is my duty as a wife."

Richard Aylward, 26, and Mary Aylward, 23, were the first couple to be hanged side-by-side in Canada, and the last to be publicly executed in Belleville.

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