

"The Incredible Mrs. Chadwick" and her story in paperback

by Shirley Whittington
A remarkable woman

lies buried in Woodstock Ontario. She was one of the cleverest and boldest embezzlers of all time

and she was a Canadian, although she carried on her scandalous career in the U.S.

Betsy Bigley was The Incredible Mrs. Chadwick and her story is told in a Paperback by John S. Crosbie.

Born in a small Ontario town near London Ontario, she was the daughter of a railroad section-hand. She soon decided that she was destined to travel through life first class, and by the time she was 13, she had learned how to part gullible men from their money.

(Author Crosbie admits that the first thirteen years of her life are scantily documented but says he has told the story "with the kind of inventiveness of which Betsy would have been proud.")

The rest of Betsy's story is based on fact. She began her career with rubber checks, drifted into prostitution, then mortgaged her sister's furniture and set herself up as a clairvoyant. She continued to finance countless caprices with checks and letters of credit which bounced

from one bank to another. Her first marriage to shy Dr. Springsteen of Cleveland lasted a dozen days. Then, posing as a helpless widow, she gave birth to a son, sent him home to her parents in Ontario, and resumed her career in clairvoyancy. A poor working man named Joe Lamb was the next victim to be fleeced. Here the law caught up with Betsy, alias Florida Blythe, alias Madame Lydia de Vere.

Convicted of forgery, she spent the next three years of her life sewing shirts in the penitentiary. She emerged, unrepentant, and set herself up as a madam once again, but didn't have to ply her trade very long.

A widowed and chinless doctor, Leroy Chadwick, rescued her from the house of pleasure and installed her in his own house. Soon, he proposed and Betsy went on to glorious heights. She

borrowed from banks, traded in counterfeit securities, and made a great deal of financial capital out of a letter she forged with Andrew Carnegie's signature.

Betsy spent wildly, furnishing her Cleveland home with outrageous opulence. She bought china, silver, furniture, clothing and jewellery. At Holt Renfrew, in Toronto, she bought a sealskin dress. At Ryrie-Birks, she bought fifty-six diamond rings. She took six lady friends on a tour of Europe, and gave each one a brass bound trunk full of finery to take on the voyage. Eventually she bankrupted her husband.

This is when she really milked the fraudulent Carnegie connection. She pretended to be his illegitimate daughter, shyly letting the secret drop where it would do the most good. ("Promise me you will never tell!" she begged one confidante. "Even though I have yet to meet him, (Carnegie), I love my father and would not in any way hurt him.")

Amazingly, people believed her. More money was advanced by bankers eager for a Carnegie connection. Betsy opened a small and enormously profitable mortgage company. This kept her in furs and jewels until one of her shareholders demanded to see a financial statement. She

was arrested, tried and sentenced to ten years in the Ohio State penitentiary. Her extravagantly furnished home was seized to pay off creditors and sightseers gawked through it for fifty cents a head.

Andrew Carnegie was a spectator at her trial. He denied any connection with her, and cheerfully refused to prosecute her for using his name for fraudulent purposes. "It is glory enough for me," said the millionaire, "that my name is good, even when I don't sign it. Mrs. Chadwick has shown that my credit is A-1."

The Incredible Mrs. Chadwick is put together with imagination but seems to have been produced sloppily. The tremendously interesting photographs are fuzzily reproduced, and require magnification to make much sense. Proof reading seems to have been capriciously done. A man speaks with "an unwanted leer." At one point Betsy feels "happier and securer" than ever before.

Still, it is a remarkable and entertaining story. All the more so because it really happened. And it happened at a time when women were supposed to stay in the parlour or kitchen, and out of the business world.

Betsy Chadwick gave a lot of gullible men the business.

Happy Cooker

Fresh peaches are in the stores - expensive, but no more so than many other fresh fruits. Canadian consumers prefer the redskinned freestone varieties. Ontario peaches are recognized as being much juicier than imported peaches and they are also easier to peel.

Because of their softer texture, they must be carefully handpicked and it takes a work force of over 5,000 pickers to get Ontario's tender harvest shipped.

Shoppers are urged to select peaches with a full creamy yellow background behind the red blush colouring if they are intended for fairly prompt consumption. Fully ripened peaches should be kept in the refrigerator to avoid spoilage and firm fruit should be purchased for home canning.

Peaches provide an excellent source of Vitamine A, and preserving or freezing insures tasty desserts long after the harvesting season.

desserts long after the harvesting season. Varieties like Redhaven, Envoy, Velvet and Loring are suited for freezing. When frozen peaches are intended for use as pie fillings, packages containing just enough for one pie should be used.

And here's how the Ontario Food Council suggests preserving peaches. Dry Sugar Pack Method: 6 cups sliced peaches, 1 cup of sugar and ascorbic acid mixture. (Follow instructions of ascorbic acid package.)

Peel the blanched peach, slice into bowl and sprinkle with sugar mixture. Continue, peach by peach, until peaches and sugar have been well combined.

Allow these to stand until sugar has dissolved and starts to draw juice from the fruit. Pack in rigid, moisture-vapor-proof containers, leaving 1/2 inch head space.

Place a crumpled piece of waxed paper on top of peaches, to keep fruit well covered with juice. Seal, label and quick freeze.

If you'd rather use a fruit cellar than a freezer to can peaches, this is how the Council suggests going about it. Purchase your fruit when flavour and quality are at their best. Choose bright, fresh quality peaches, free from bruises and discoloration. Sort for ripeness, and allow too firm peaches to ripen at room temperature.

Make syrup for fruits either thin or heavy, and prepare approximately 1 1/2 - 2 cups syrup for each quart used. Place peaches, a few at a time, in a wire basket or in a large square of cheesecloth. Plunge into boiling water for 1/2-1 minute and dip immediately into cold water. Remove skins.

Cut in halves and remove pits. To keep from discolouring, immerse immediately in brine made of 1 tsp salt to 1 quart water. Drain thoroughly before placing in jars for processing.

Place lids in a saucepan of boiling water. Remove one lid from boiling water at a time, to cover the jar.

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Simcoe County to sponsor recreation conference

The Simcoe County Recreation Committee will be holding a conference in early October focusing on the co-operative planning and the establishment of recreational facilities in the county. The conference is a result of, and is part of, a feasibility study requested by the Simcoe County Council in 1975. The conference will be held at Georgian College in Barrie and it is hoped that positive recommendations and subsequent action will evolve from the workshop discussions.

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